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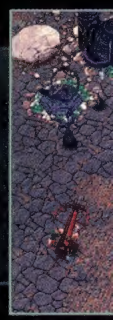

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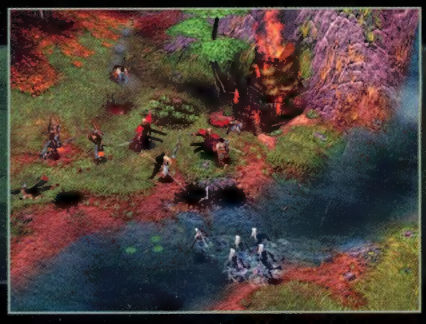

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"Top 20 PC Titles of E3 2001." -GAMESPOT.COM

"Five Most Impressive Titles of Show." -NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE

"Runner-up, Best Strategy Game of E3 2001." -GAMESPY

"Top 10 Games of E3 2001." -COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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Feature: First Person Shooters
Trigger Happy
IT'S BEEN THREE YEARS SINCE HALF-LIFE BLEW THE FIRST-PERSON GENRE WIDE OPEN. Now, finally, the next generation is about to explode.
CGW got hands-on with all of 'em—and WE LIKED WHAT WE SAW.
HALF-LIFE is dead. Well, actually, no, it isn't. Valve's seminal, groundbreaking shooter is still alive and well in the form of add-ons and mods like Counter-Strike. But it is becoming dated, as are all the other giants of the genre. Yet, there are games on the way in all the biggest franchises—QUAKE, DUKE NUKEM, UNREAL, and HALF-LIFE—but when we are actually going to get to play them is another matter entirely.
And, like you, we're impatient. We want to shoot things on our PCs and we want to do it now. Fortunately, there's an entirely new wave of first-person shooters that are actually nearing completion—shooters that have absorbed the lessons taught by HALF-LIFE to offer the kind of ravishing and immersive experiences that move the genre forward. Over the next 16 pages, CGW gets hands-on with all of them, and tells you why the genre has never looked better.
Aliens vs. Predator 2
By William O'Neal

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Shooters

We've whined about the lack of quality shooters ever since HALF-LIFE and NO ONE LIVES FOREVER spoiled us rotten. So we finally went out and got some serious play time with some of the biggest new shooters coming your way. Read our report, and see what's in store for your inner twitcher.

Cover illustration by Marc Sasso

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Republic: *If the cessation of the Cold War dashed your dreams of being a communist despot, fear not. In REPUBLIC, you'll get your chance to rule a nation of millions with an iron fist.* Page 52

IL-2 Sturmovik: *No, Virginia, flight sims aren't dead—they're only getting better. Especially if WWII's Eastern Front is your battle theater of choice.* Page 54

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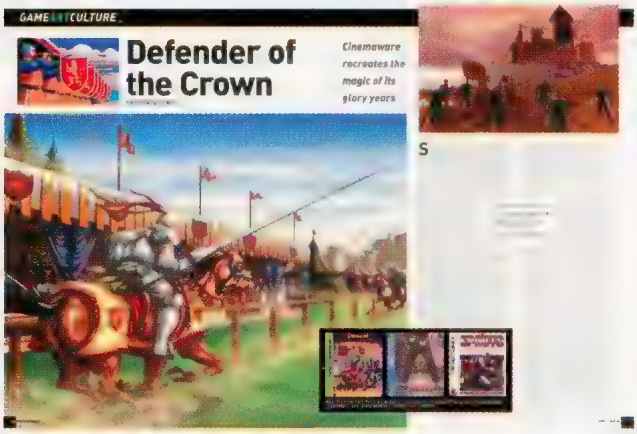

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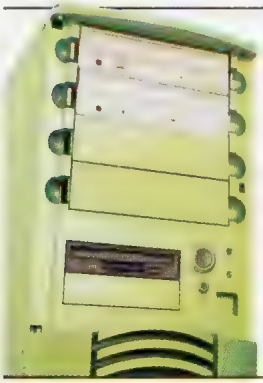
It came from the grave: An international group of gaming men brings Cinemaware back to life.



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Patch Work

We review only finished games—no betas, no patches.

Those words preface every *CGW* review section, and man alive, don't people hate us for it. With every negative review we publish, regardless of how deserving the game, we are guaranteed to get something between a trickle and a flood of email questioning our intelligence, qualifications, and the size or (more likely) existence of our genitalia. While the content and tenor of these letters vary greatly, a common theme is frequently sounded: "The game is much better once you install the patch."

Okay, let's start off by acknowledging one thing: There is an audience for everything. While the vast majority of humankind may loathe the film, there actually *are* people buying the DVD of *Waterworld*. Granted, these fans are probably spending their spare time trying to duplicate the urine-purification system so artfully showcased in that movie, but they love that film and will vociferously challenge any opinion to the contrary. This does not mean that anyone who disagrees with the owlish sages of *CGW* is a pee drinker, but just as the *Waterworld* wonk asserts that the film is redeemed by the director's cut, the DAIKATANA aficionado claims that the months-late patch totally makes the game a Hall of Famer. And reasonable minds the world over can only respond, "Have you suffered a blow to the head?"

That said, there is some validity to most "it's better with the patch" assertions. So why do we not take patches into account when we review a product? Because nobody buys a recall; they endure it. When you buy a Ford Explorer, you don't expect the tires to blow out while you're carting your kids off to Little League. And when you install MYTH II, you don't expect it to reformat your hard drive. Problems like these get fixed because it's the manufacturer's moral responsibility to do so. And it's our responsibility to point out when the emperor has no clothes. Sure, His Highness is promising to throw some pants on in the coming months. But right now, he's just an obtrusive naked guy, and it's *CGW*'s job to tell you that. What would our credibility be with you, our readers, if we failed to do so?

No one has ever purchased a game and run home just to sit and stare at the box thinking, "Boy, I can't wait for the patch so I can install this!" We've been deluged with mail excoriating us for our two-star rating of TRIBES 2, but I'm here to tell you that despite a fondness for engaging in hours-long bouts of bare-chested Irish folk dancing, Tom Price is no fool and his assessment of TRIBES 2 was right on the mark for anyone who bought the game when it was released.

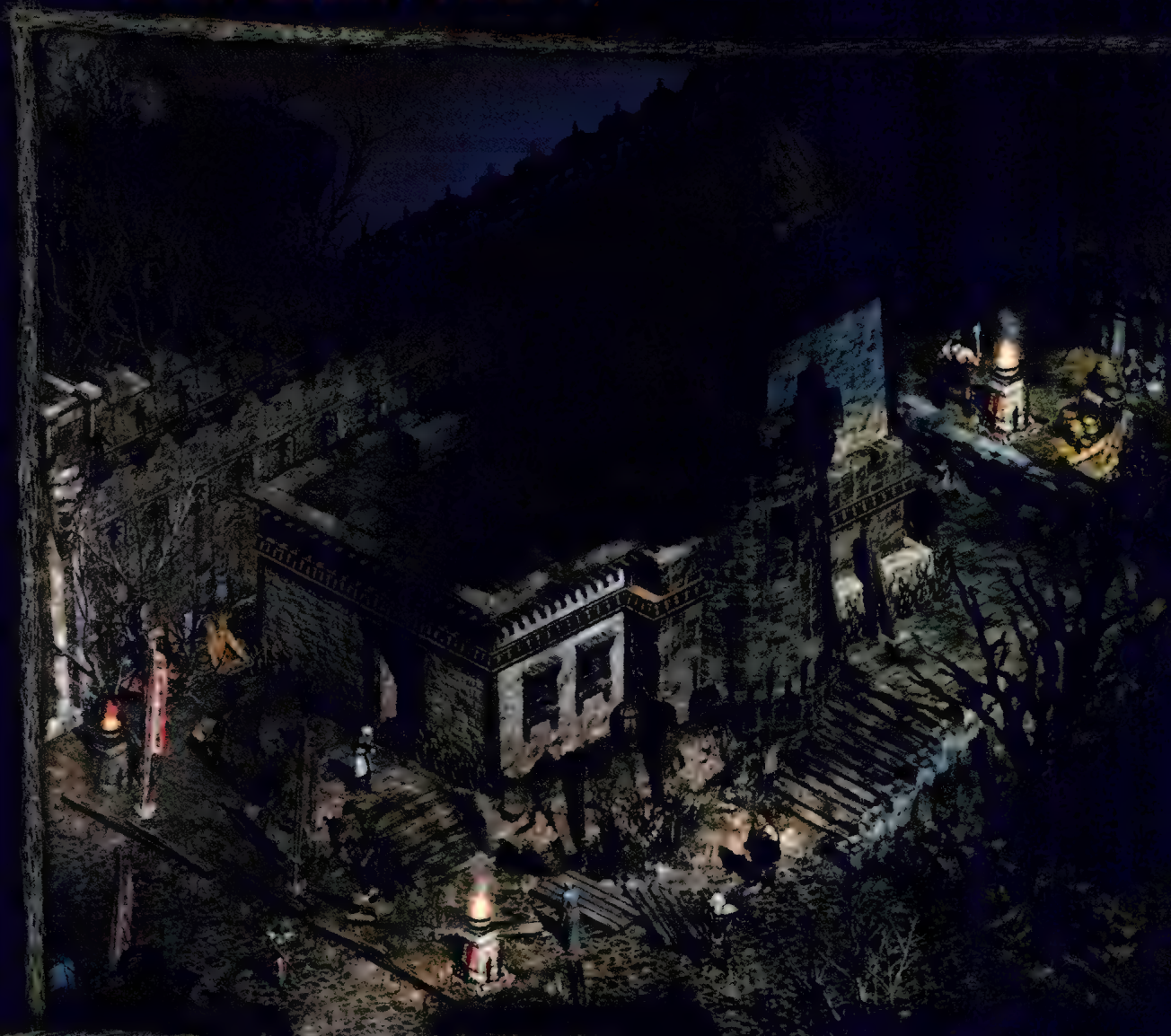
The proliferation of massively multiplayer games over the last year has introduced some interesting issues for us here. Since these games are practically living things—constantly under development and unplayable without weekly patches—we're going to make a strong effort to revisit these titles and let you know about their current state. Especially considering the community growth and development that takes place with online RPGs, the time has come for us to consider and appreciate the evolution of a game.

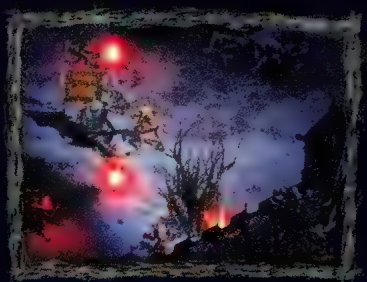
So let it begin right now: TRIBES 2, courtesy of the latest major patch, is much more playable and fun than when we reviewed it. It took a few months, but it's pretty good now.

I'd still take a pass on BATTLE CRUISER 3000, though. CGW

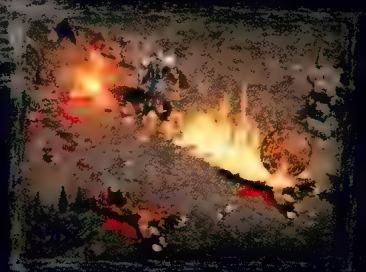
Robert Coffey is CGW's reviews editor.

Destruction Awaits...





Two New Character Classes
Unleash the fury of 60 new unique skills and spells as the stealthy Assassin or the shape-shifting Druid.



Wickedly Enhanced Graphics
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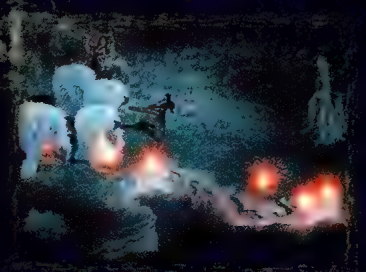

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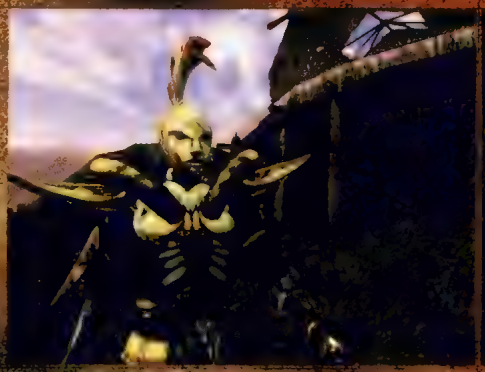
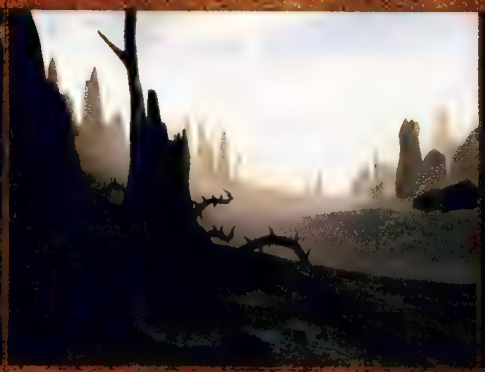
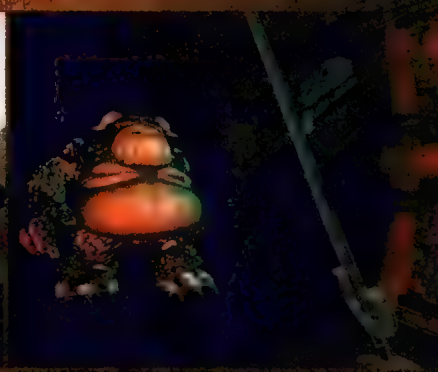


Best RPG of E3
- Computer Gaming World



Best of E3 - RPG
- Game Revolution



Top 20 Games of E3
- GameSpot

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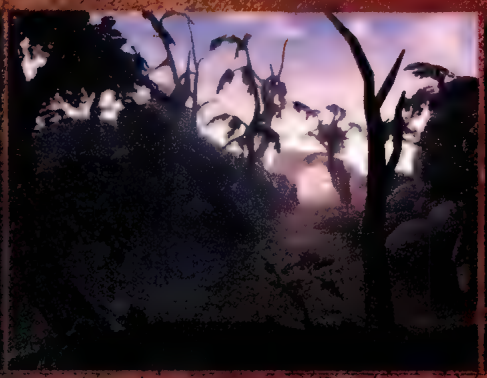
All screenshots from PC version.

#1 Xbox Game of E3
Gamesmania



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LETTERS

Letter of the Month

I am not a gamer, but I'm pretty sure my husband is. I don't see him that often, but the evidence is all there: computer magazines in the bathrooms for those times when he's not in the computer room, missing dishes that reappear in hordes a week later, a lower gas bill because his three computers generate so much heat, a higher MasterCard bill because he needs to have two online accounts, window blinds that are continuously drawn to eliminate glare, and that ubiquitous twinkling sound indicating that some computer persona has just opened another portal.

I sense him climbing into bed late at night (or early in the morning), and I hear him take the stairs two at a time in the waking hours to make sure his alter ego hasn't died or been loaded down with Lugian (sp?) weapons. Every so often I cheer his new armor, wish him good luck on his quest, and pretend that something "so cool" is so cool. And despite the string of expletives that sometimes drift down the stairs, I have even gone so far as to help him move a low-level guy across the map to a new town.

I love my husband, and now I understand him even better. You see, even though I am not a gamer, I find myself addicted to Jeff Green's column. It's intelligent, it's funny, and it's sarcastic...the same qualities I find so attractive in my husband. I also read your letters section because you, as editors of a magazine, can respond in exactly the way some idiots deserve. As a teacher who cannot always respond in a way that truly reflects my feelings and thoughts, I live vicariously through you and your responses. Keep up the good work!

While reading Jeff's DoarkusSpeak column [April 2001], I finally "got it." My husband feels that same way about other people and human interaction, so I never quite understood how he spent so much time with other people in ASHERON'S CALL. If he was always in player-killer mode, I might get it. But he's usually being helpful, especially with that portal mule. He has even made pseudo-friends that he likes to play AC with. I see now that it's therapy, and darn cheap therapy at that. Twenty bucks a month so my husband stays sane...completely worth it.

Thank you, Jeff Green. And if you happen to print this letter, tell my husband I'm thinking of him and I'll see him when he gets out of the bathroom.

Julie Hunt Barnhardt

Sorry Julie, but we're not going to help strengthen the bond between you and your husband. Why? Because you're obviously the woman of our dreams, and we'll do anything we can to drive a wedge between the two of you so that eventually, you come running into our warm, hairy, Cheeto-dust-encrusted arms. We'll be waiting.

THE SIMS: Game? Not a Game?

All hail Jeff Green.

Now that that's out of the way and it's the start of a Glorious New Era, can we talk about THE SIMS for a minute? Who are they, and why are they in your magazine? THE SIMS may be a phenomenal software sales success, but it is NOT A GAME! It's a depressing parody of real life. Where's the fun? Watching my alter ego lose his job and pass out on the floor? And HOUSE PARTY: 4.5 stars for an add-on? Then you turn around and give KOHAN—which is arguably a contender for real-time strategy of the year—4 stars? Please, let's get back to gaming.

Simon Huntington

So Don't Play It

Okay, look, people played COUNTER-STRIKE because it was a realistic and team-based and objective-based counter-terrorism game. Now, with all these new guns and features, it will simply suck. First, the suicide belt. I see that from here: A team of 10 terrorists will all buy this belt, go in the middle of the opposing team, and with all these explosions, 90 percent of the players will overflow and drop. And I can bet this will happen in every CS server. And what's the point of the crossbow? Huh...this should be a realistic game, and I never heard that the terrorists or counterterrorist organizations were using crossbows. Then, you come with land mines and grenade launchers...welcome to COUNTER-QUAKE (or QUAKE-STRIKE...whatever)!!! Finally...the flares. Look, every time someone in COUNTER-STRIKE opens a flashlight, the server lags—even for people with cable modems—so if some players use flares... again, like the suicide belt, people will lag, and drop. Instead, just give us some real cool guns like the FN-FNC, or the Sig-SSG 3000. I'm a CS fan since the beginning, and please, don't make me stop playing CS to play PAC-MAN or TETRIS.

Guillaume Lavoie

Don't Diss Doc Ock

No offense, but your subjects for your "How Do We Rate" box are getting lamer by the issue. Last issue [July, 2001], it was Canucks who I have never seen or heard of (except Celine Dion). And this issue [August 2001] is animated evil characters. I guess you run out of things to put in it after 25 years, but you can do better than that.

Geoffrey

Hello! They weren't just "animated evil characters"! They were all Spider-Man villains. Duh! If our ideas stink so bad, you think of a theme and send it to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com. If yours is chosen, we'll send you a lame prize.

Fun With Legos

Seeing the Read.Me section with the Mad Cat made by K'NEX [August, 2001], I wondered if I could make one out of Legos. So I did and I think it came out pretty good, although it is not very stable (maybe I should glue the pieces together). I have a picture of it but the quality isn't that good because my digital camera sucks.

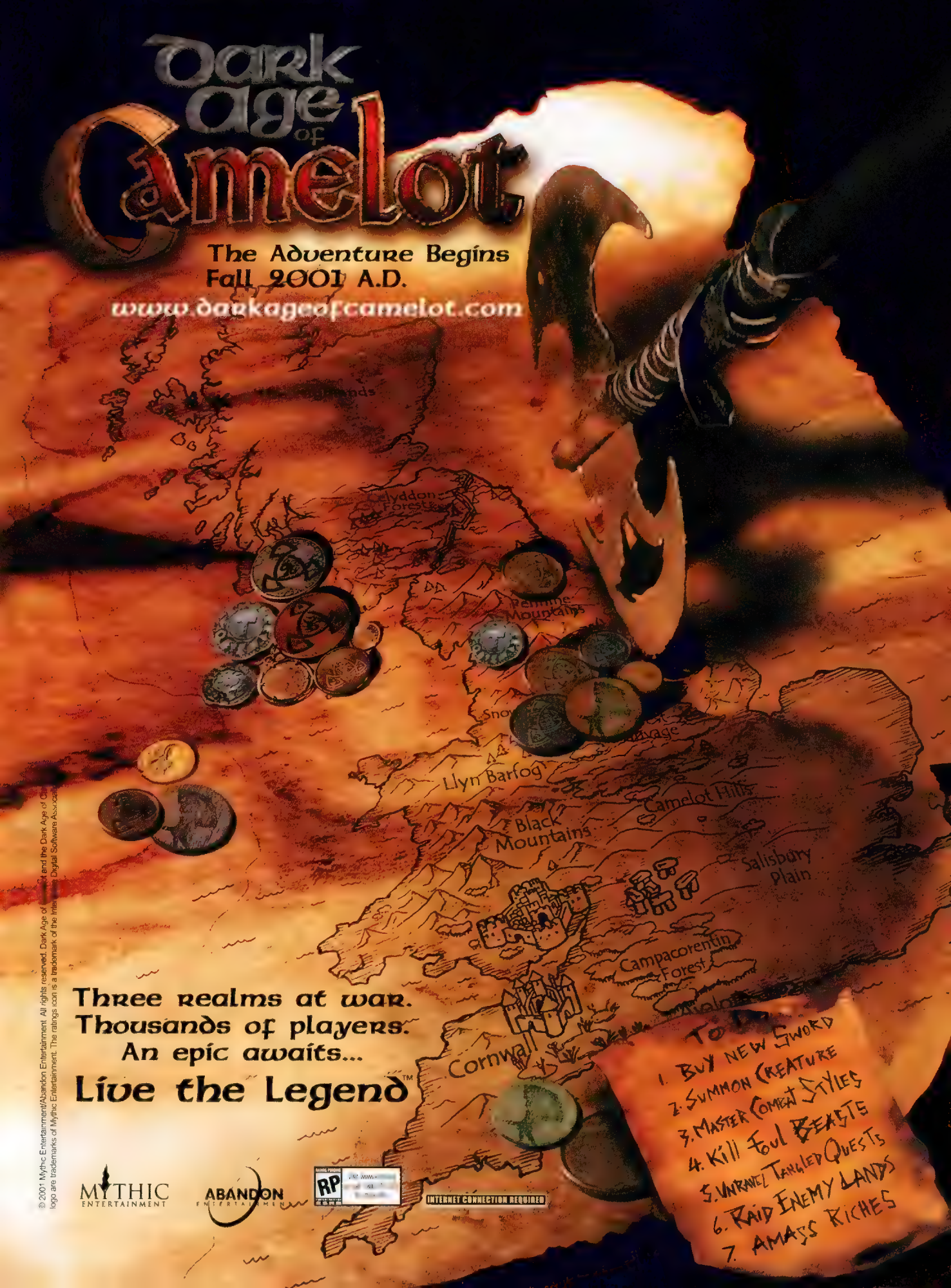
Stephen Cooney

Impressive, Stephen. Now let's see you build one at full scale. With working Gauss Guns and everything.

The Other Woman of Our Dreams

Hey ya'll!

I'm just writing to say that everyone should listen to Jeff Green. For once (j/k),



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the man knows of which he speaks [*Greenspeak*, August 2001]. It is all good! For some reason, magazines seem to be taking the "you will only buy ONE gaming platform" stand. While this may be true for a six-year-old whose parents will get her one platform (probably a Nintendo), past a certain age, when we spend our own money, most of us eventually get two or three!

I am a rabid PC gamer. I won't try to deny it. I play at least 10 hours of ASHERON'S CALL a week. I'm having a lot of fun kvetching at the .08 DIABLO II patch and its total dearth of set items. I'm playing BGII for the second time through (this time I want to get Viconia and Keldorn hitched! <grin>). I own two computers (an AMD 900 and a 1.2) and buy at least two games a month, in good months.

I also own, in no particular order, an NES, an SNES, an N64, a Saturn, a Dreamcast, a PSX, and a PS2. Oh, also a GBC and a GBA. Heck, I don't even have a console bent. I have several good board games, (like *World in Flames*), a couple of interesting card games, and the core parts of six different tabletop RPGs. And I'm a woman! So people need to stop talking like it's the end of the world, and PC gamers need to stop crying. Every console has its strengths. I'd like to see TOAW2 on PS2 <grin>. This huge number of consoles rocks! More the merrier, in my opinion. Just gives me more to play. It's allllll good!

Cassie Tipton

Well, you're obviously what we would call a "core" gamer, and the fact that you're a woman too just supports our persistent claim that gaming is universal. Will you marry us?

MYST III, TRIBES 2 Reviews: Did We Even Play Them?

Recently, CGW *wrote negative reviews of two very popular games, TRIBES 2 and MYST III: EXILE. Letters from readers alternated between supporting the reviewers (Tom Price and Charles Ardai, respectively)*

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CORRECTION: Last month we listed a 900GHz CPU for our lean machine rig. Um, since such speeds don't exist (much like Will O'Neal's proofreading skills), we'll have to settle for the actual 900MHz rig. Our bad.

and questioning their chromosome counts. The majority fell into the latter category. Here's a sampling:

Seems to me Charles Ardai has no idea that the things he hates about the MYST franchise are the reasons people buy it [July, 2001]. His talents may be better utilized reviewing first-person-rat-in-a-maze meat grinders aimed at pustulent, pud-pulling adolescents. At least his adrenaline will spurt a bit.

Dan Simpson

I am writing to tell you that I was thoroughly disgusted with your review of MYST III: EXILE. I bought the game the day it came out and I thought it was fabulous. I have completed all of the MYST games and read all of the novels, and in my opinion, EXILE is the best game yet. The visuals are incredible and for the most part the puzzles are well thought-out and imaginative. As for there being no reward for your effort, the puzzles are their own reward. When you do a crossword puzzle, do you do it because you expect some nifty cinematic sequence at the end? No! Of course not! You do it because it's challenging and fun! The same goes for the puzzles in MYST III. Perhaps you guys are just too used to QUAKE and UNREAL to appreciate a quality game that requires thought and intelligence.

A disgruntled MYST fan

I can't believe that you would rate MYST III as WEAK! It seems that you have never played a MYST game before! If you did, what did you EXPECT?? Your rating process is lousy!!! I can't believe I actually wanted this magazine, when there are BETTER ones out there!!

MYST III is a GREAT game, AND ALSO WHO CARES WHAT YOU THINK!! All the games that get good ratings are wargames, fantasy games, and shoot-'em-up games! Even the ratings on those are lousy! Your rating for adventure games has been lousy,

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including the rating of MYST III!

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JoK1959

You are crazy. Two stars for TRIBES 2? For what? Name me one game with as much in it that hasn't needed patches or fixes. I'm sure you can, being the all-knowing person you are. Hmmm, why am I wasting my time?

Chas Van Buskirk

How the HELL could you give TRIBES 2 two stars??!!! Do you even play FPS [first-person shooter] games? Or is it because you suck more than Jeff Green at CS and you got pissed off at people kicking your sorry ass that you gave it such a bad score? TRIBES 2 is the best multiplayer FPS game out there, you just suck too much at it to notice. From the T2 community, go to hell.

Oh, and have a nice day playing TIMELINE, you f**king pansy.

Tony Fu

Thanks for restoring my faith in computer gaming journalism, Mr. Price. You are a remarkable man.

I had been so eager for TRIBES 2, only to be disappointed by the sad state it shipped in. How on earth could such a thing have happened? Don't developers and publishers realize the repercussions of selling a title this infested by bugs? What were they thinking?

It went retail in April, right? Now at the end of June, they still haven't resolved the lockups, the mysterious Unhandled Exception c0000005, or the redjacks—but they have been "tweaking" vehicles, turrets, and other nonsense. The current patch is a beta, and they're asking the public to test it for them. It's unbelievable.

It's not what we were promised. It's certainly not what they hyped and advertised. I can't believe Sierra and Dynamix released the game in the pathetic state that it was in.

Brian

After reading the babes in toyland article ["Babes in Boyland," August, 2001], I felt confused. Is Holy Fleming gay or bi? I ask this because she said "from talking to a downright delectible sampling of booth babes." Now don't take this the wrong way. I have nothing against lesbians (I work with a bunch of them in fact), but this just struck me as being very odd.

Brandon Ralston

Holly Fleming responds:

Dear Brandon,

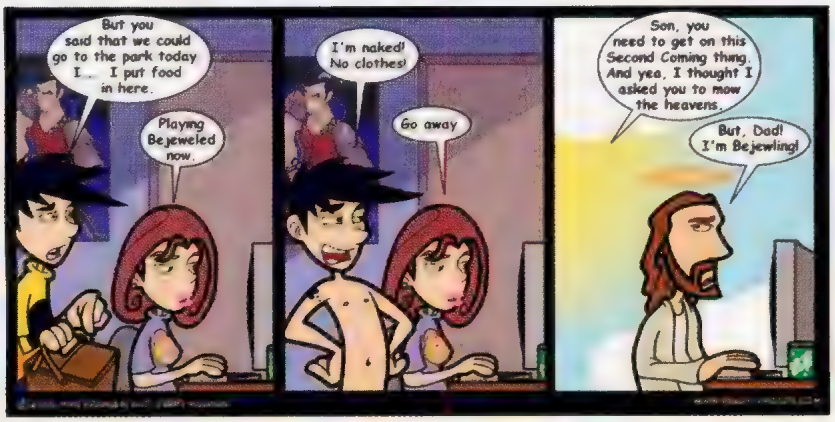
I am sorry to have confused you. That probably happens to you a lot.

While asking about my sexual preference is highly inappropriate, I will assure you that I am quite straight, though not at all inclined toward confused types such as yourself. Maybe the lesbians you work with will give you a try.

Thanks for writing, Brandon!

P.S. My name is "Holly," not "Holy"—but that's a minor distinction.

Penny Arcade© by Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins (www.penny-arcade.com)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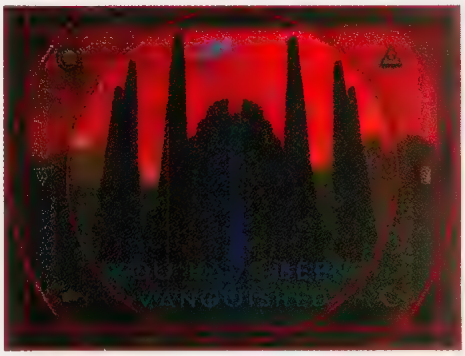

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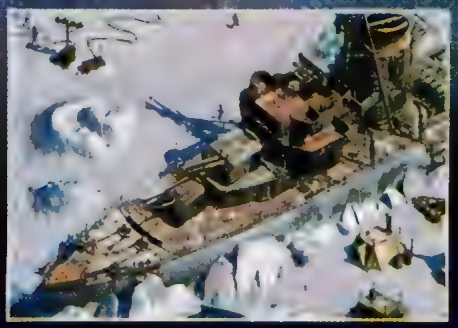

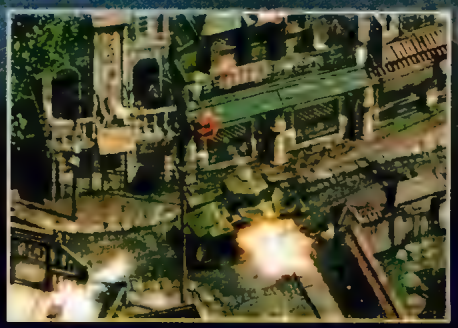

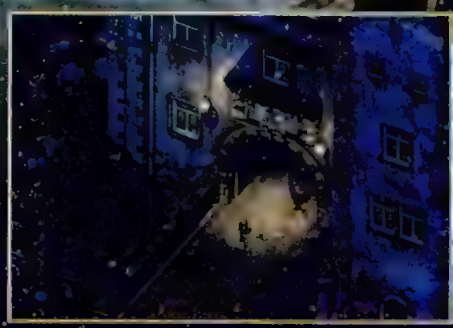

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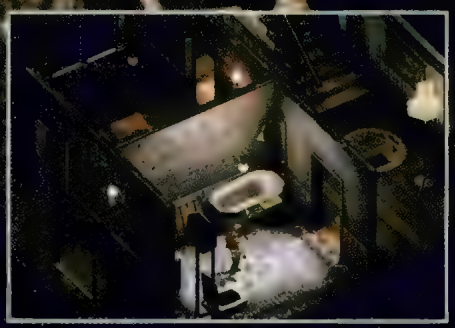

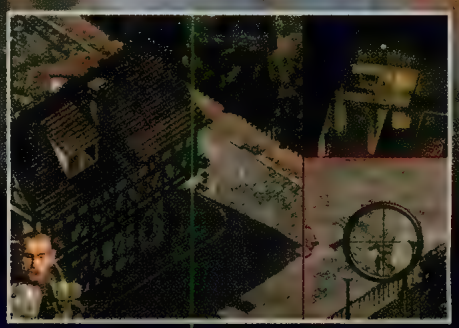

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HOT SHOTS

QUICK TAKES ON GAMES IN THE WORKS

"Project 1"

The "dead flight-sim genre" continues to crank out exciting new games. Thirdwire is currently working on PROJECT 1 (working title), a flight sim set in the 1960s, when fighter jets were coming of age. They plan to include the F100 Super Saber, F-104 Starfighter, A-4 Skyhawk, and the F-4 Phantom II. The sim will feature a dynamic campaign spanning more than a decade. Starting with the F100 and no radar or missiles, you gain new equipment and planes as you progress through the campaign and the technology evolves. It's a unique approach for a flight sim, one that should make for rewarding gameplay.

Comanche 4

NovaLogic recently surprised us with a glimpse of their fantastic-looking COMANCHE 4. The game boasts a brand-new engine with amazingly realistic rotor wash effects and weather conditions, and an emphasis on a more action-oriented gameplay (they flew the chopper with a gamepad). The fourth installment of the series is based on the Army's next-generation armed recon helo: the Boeing-Sikorsky RAH-66. The game's missions will reflect the helicopter's versatility in recon, ground attack, and air combat. Coming later this year.

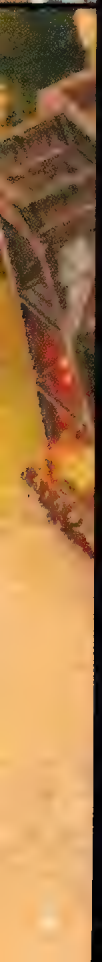
HOT SHOTS

Moto Racer 3

There have been good motorcycle racing sims of both flavors—motocross and superbike—for some time now, but only one series has offered both in the same game and done it well. It's been over two years since MOTO RACER 2 was released, but from the look of these screenshots, MOTO RACER 3 will be worth the wait when it's released in October.

Praetorians

We're certainly intrigued by this strategy game set during the Roman era. It looks like it'll focus on formation movement and impressive 3D battles in realtime. Not that we would know—we've told Eidos three times that we want more info on the game, only to be told they don't have anything. Hey Eidos! If you don't know jack, how about sending someone from Pyro Studios over to show us their game?



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ACTUAL SCREEN SHOT

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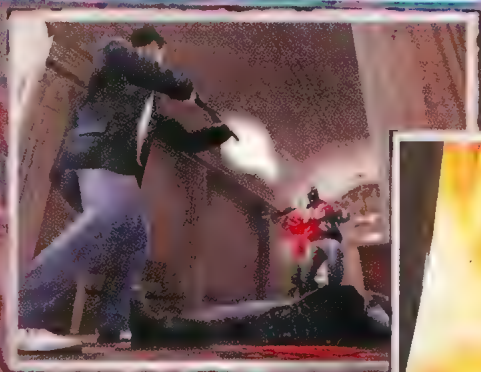

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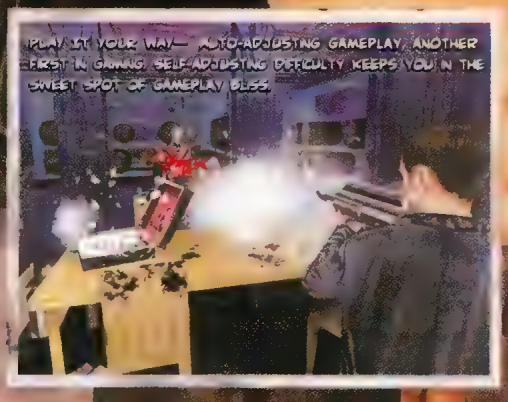

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Inside
Addicted to BEJEWELED
Baal vs. Bhaal
GBA Survival Guide

Unfit for Duty

Gamers are fighting mad over rough WORLD WAR II ONLINE launch

It's hard to use the term *launch* in describing the release of WORLD WAR II ONLINE. It launched with all the glory of a Mercury rocket teetering over and burning on the launchpad. Gamers eager to experience the excitement of World War II combat with thousands of real players faced long load times, frequent crashes, and often a complete inability to log on. Online forums lit up with complaints from gamers accusing the developers of false advertising and releasing an unfinished product. With the subsequent rocky release of ANARCHY ONLINE, gamers wondered if a massively multiplayer game would ever work upon launch.

Indeed, EVERQUEST, ULTIMA ONLINE, and ASHERON'S CALL all had problems when they launched. But the rollout of WWII ONLINE was the worst of any massively multiplayer game to date. Some 15,000 people apparently bought the game the first day it was available, only to be greeted with a 67MB patch download, servers capped at 500 users, horrible frame rates, long load times, and other bugs. Few people could even log on, and those who did often found the game choppy or unreliable. Publisher Strategy First claims the difficulties were largely related to unexpected user volume, but the game clearly was not ready for prime time.

"We were overwhelmed by the amount of people," says Don McFatridge, president of Strategy First. "There were some problems with the servers at the beginning. Would we have wanted the launch to go better? Of course. We could have launched in three months and it would have been better. We were willing to give [online provider] Playnet more time. We did *not* force them to publish. They felt they were ready."

Obviously, they weren't. Why not? Reasons vary, depending on whom you ask. Users say the game wasn't adequately tested, had buggy code, and lacked sufficient server capacity. The producers blame circumstances beyond their control, including problems with servers and server hosting. However, server problems could not explain why some features advertised on the box weren't available, including "combined land, sea, and air operations" and "over 50 WWII vehicles and weapons." Naval combat is months away

Notable Quotes

Observations from around the gaming world

"Shouldn't we expect a bit more than crashes and bugs from a product we're spending our hard-earned money on?" ***—Eldin on lumthemad.net, referring to problems with ANARCHY ONLINE***

"When [WWII ONLINE] was launched, there was capacity for perhaps 1,000 people. Yet they printed 100,000 copies and said they were 'surprised' at the response. If this isn't an outright lie, then it shows a practically criminal stupidity. I have been unable to play this game and my requests for technical assistance have gone unanswered." ***—"Pujols," threatening legal action on the WORLD WAR II ONLINE forum***

"Spend a few hours with a six-year-old who is undergoing chemotherapy and is not expected to live. Sit down, look him or her in the eyes, and explain why this is so important to you...[that] you're going to file a lawsuit to get your $40 back. If you can convince them, fine, file the lawsuit." ***—"Cgraham," responding to "Pujols" on the forum***

"I definitely get discouraged at times trying to get this game up and running, but I see the Rats [developer Cornered Rat Software] VERY HARD at work getting everything out that they promised. They are not walking away from this. And the few times that I do manage to get online, I have a blast doing so and see the great potential of this game." ***—"Tailspin," commenting in the forum***

"This is the first time in history that something like this has been attempted. Did somebody sue Alexander Graham Bell because his first phones had bugs or didn't work?" ***—"Pfcolaf," on the same forum***

"If Detroit launched new car models the way [game companies] launch online games, you'd take delivery at the lot only to find that the engine wouldn't start, two wheels were missing, and the driver had only 12 inches of head space...." ***—Jessica Mulligan, skotos.net***

Unfit for Duty

Continued from page 29

from availability, and many weapons, including machine guns, were still unavailable two weeks after the game's launch.

To deflect user complaints, Strategy First extended the 30-day free trial period indefinitely while it worked on fixing the game. Meanwhile, Playnet and Cornered Rat technicians were working to squash bugs, reduce load times, and improve stability. "Anyone getting into the game now can have a rewarding experience, and it will get better," says McFatridge. "Everything that's promised is going to be there, and more. That's the beauty of the team behind it."

But will enough gamers still be around to enjoy it once the game is working? McFatridge answers, "You have to look at this as something others would not do. We knew we were taking a calculated risk in putting this out, but we have to look at what's been accomplished with the size of the world. I think people will stick with it because it's a game people want."

—Thomas L. McDonald

Addiction du Jour

Bedeviled by BEJEWELED

The *CGW* crew is spending more time shifting jewels than a high priced mohel, and it's not because your beloved band of pasty misfits has begun dealing in gems. No, the sad truth is that a simple little puzzle game, BEJEWELED, has us as transfixed as a *Magic: The Gathering* fan club in a strip bar. We haven't seen a game threaten magazine production this much since the days of the original QUAKE.

It's easy to dismiss BEJEWELED as a sort of turn-based TETRIS clone: Line up three or more similar gems to clear that row and drop down more. But play until that magic moment when the board opens up and you become lost in the glittering array before you. You'll find yourself muttering (as we do) "That game didn't count" as you start another round in a ceaseless quest to top your high score.

Currently, Reviews Editor Robert Coffey is the office BEJEWELED champ with over 30,000 points in regular mode and a godlike 29,250 points in the heartlessly cruel Timed Trial. Robert's secret? "Listen to the jewels and they will tell you where to go." Man alive, what a putz.

You can find BEJEWELED on this month's CD, or download it from popcap.com; for a $20 registration fee you can play until your eyes bleed. Don't say we didn't warn you. *—David Manning*

Baal vs. Bhaal

It's surprising enough that Blizzard's DIABLO II and Interplay's BALDUR'S GATE 2 expansions were released within days of each other, but we began to suspect something sinister when we realized that their chief villains have almost identical names. Seeing the potential for a smackdown, we decided to pit the two against each other in a battle of demonic proportions.
—Mark Asher

INTERPLAY'S BHAAL

BLIZZARD'S BAAL

	GAMEPLAY	TOUGHNESS	ABILITY TO GET A DATE	RANK IN THE PANTHEON	FAVORITE ATTACK	WHAT THEY HATE ABOUT EACH OTHER	FAMILY PICNICS	FAVORITE SPORT	ENDORSEMENT OPPORTUNITIES	TECHNICAL ABILITY
BLIZZARD'S BAAL	Lots of clicks	Lord of Destruction	Gruesome white face, horns, and bony fingers	Big-time demon	Uses tentacles to grab enemies and then launch an Incineration Nova	Getting Bhaal's mail	Diablo and Mephisto	Rugby	Dave's Insanity Hot Sauce, American Bar Association	Can hotwire a car
INTERPLAY'S BHAAL	Lots of dialog	Lord of Murder	Skeleton head with glowing eyes	Greater deity	30 feet tall with four arms; can gore people with 7-foot horns	Getting Baal's mail	Dozens of illegitimate children	Basketball	Roto-Rooter	Can throw a bus
	Blizzard's Baal. Last time we checked, people weren't getting any smarter.	Interplay's Bhaal. It's easier to fix the furniture than to resurrect the dead.	Baal. After last call in a dimly lit bar he might get lucky. With that head, Bhaal's got only one shot a year: Halloween.	Bhaal, but it's not all good. As head of a religion, the paperwork's killing him.	Bhaal. He can hold you down while eating spicy beans with cheese and watching reruns of *Full House*. Fatality!	Push. They're too afraid of the postal service to complain. An irate postal worker's scarier than any horned demon.	Baal. With no kids to worry about, he can sit back and drink The down side: When Diablo and Mephisto get drunk they insist on tail wrestling	Baal. He can still find players to scrum, but not even Shaq can go one-on-one with Bhaal.	As much as we hate lawyers, we hate clogged toilets more. This one goes to Baal.	Bhaal, no contest.

There it is: Blizzard's Baal wins by a nose, but since we think Bhaal would rip his arms out and then do the same to us if we declared him the loser, we'll just call it a tie. The real winners are gamers anyway, since we get to play two new installments of these hot RPGs.

THE SWINGIN' SINGLE MAN'S

Game Boy Advance Survival Guide

The right games and accessories can definitely help you score

The world is a cruel place, yes? A fact highlighted by the brutal reality that no matter how much we like our COUNTER-STRIKES, our BLACK & WHITES, our Sound Blaster Lives, and our DYN-O-MITE!, we can't carry them with us. Shuddup, you in the back with that laptop sass. Unless what you want is some hot mama sidling up to you at the watering hole and asking, "Is that a 1 gigahertz Pentium III with 32-meg GeForce2Go graphics and an UltraXGA display in your pocket...or are you just happy to see me?" then even a die-hard PC wirehead must admit that for quick-fix gaming on the go, you have to look "outside the box."

But if the mere mention of a swingin' portable makes you picture POKEMON in your palm, you should know Nintendo has upped the ante for the mobile Sam Malone with some pheromone-enhancing features in its Game Boy Advance. You won't need fast cars and fancy clothes to magnetize the mommas when you whip out your 3-inch LCD and tell her it displays up to 32,768 colors. Pretty soon the only colors you'll see are the colors of looooooove.

If you're starting at the back of the pack, you'll want to equip yourself with the latest in designer appliances, including: Game Holster Find yourself a superswank fanny pack, complete with integral belt loop and compartments for extra GBA cartridges. Women will flock to you as if you were a banana daiquiri when you're sporting one of these waist-enhancing wonders. Light Source Although the gleam from your pearly whites is enough to brighten any room, it's probably not enough to illuminate the GBA screen. The LSA will not only provide an attractive glow at night, but also protect the screen from getting scratched by lipstick cases, stiletto heels, and hardened-steel bra hooks. Game Link Cable This allows you to hook it up, and by "hook it up" we mean get your multiplayer on. By "get your multiplayer on," we mean hook it up. Headphones Unplug the funk and switch on the game! You'll be amazed at how good these games sound when they're ringin' in your ears.

So there you have it. More than enough reasons to make a high-powered PC quiver in its Lian Li casing. Verily, the Game Boy Advance has arrived! Whether you like it or not, whether you respect its lack of gigapixel-pushing power or not, it's here to stay. It'll make you laugh, it'll make you cry, and yes, it will become a part of you.

—James "The Milkman" Mielke

If you don't got fuel for your pocket rocket, you don't got jack. These are the top five games you'll want to have on your hip when that special lady comes a callin':

Super Dodge Ball Advance: It's fast paced, it's violent, it's easy to pick up, and it's got big red balls. Just like you. Whaling people with a fastball to the face has never been more in fashion. Link up for some hot two-player action.

Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2: Impress the crowd with your cavalier use of words and phrases like "rad," "x-treme!" and "grody face-plant, dude!" while performing hundreds of linked tricks and combos in this highly addictive, near perfect adaptation of the PlayStation classic.

Castlevania: Circle of the Moon: If there's anything chicks love more than vampires, it's a vampire *slaya*! Which is where you come in, Casanova. Kick undead ass up and down the halls of the damned—and get away with that garlic breath for the first time ever—in this incredible update to the long-running series.

GT Advance Championship Racing: Still can't get the fancy car thing out of your head, even though you've got 32 bits of power in your hand? Don't sweat it. With GT Advance, riding the bus will make you feel like you're driving at Monte Carlo.

Klonoa Empire of Dreams: If you grew up on the fat little plumber, kick that fool to the curb and turn your eyes to Namco's hep black cat with the big white ears. Razor-quick response, snappy graphics, great sounds, and plenty of innovative challenges for a sharp-dressed man.

CGW MIX

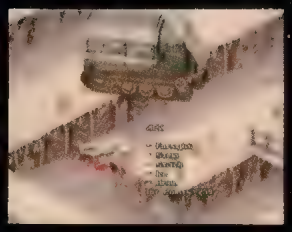
Our latest obsessions

High Heat 2002

Now that 3DO has finally patched our all-time favorite sports game, we can't get enough. Once you commit to playing a full season, HIGH HEAT just boggles the mind with its almost eerie ability to capture the nuances, drama, and shifting tides of a full 162-game schedule.

World War II Online

After a rocky start, this game is actually starting to deliver on its promise. There's nothing quite like shelling a truck full of German soldiers from the safety of your Mark IV tank, knowing that they're real people sitting in front of a computer somewhere across the world.



Fallout Tactics

Some of us are still slogging through the decaying wastelands of FALLOUT TACTICS. Whether we're turning Super Mutants into chunks of man meat or deciding what perks to give our squaddies, FALLOUT TACTICS has the looks, the atmosphere, and the gameplay to fix our turn-based strategy jones.

Marathon 2

WTF? Well...yeah! There haven't been any great shooters lately, we've replayed HALF-LIFE for the fourth time, and...well...we were feeling a bit nostalgic. After getting some new Macs we fired it up and realized why it was such a great game for its time. Before you go accusing us of living in the past, make sure you don't have any DOOM wads on your computer.

KOREANS DEVOUR DIABLO II

It's as if Blizzard has discovered a vast gold mine in the Far East: Koreans can't seem to get enough of its games. STARCRAFT cracked the million-sold mark two years ago in Korea, and it's still going strong. Now DIABLO II has sold a million copies there. In fact, Korea accounts for about one third of DIABLO II's worldwide sales. The blistering sales pace is especially remarkable considering that Korea's population is about one fifth that of the United States. It's easy to see why this small Asian country has become so important to game publishers.

Such success can cause headaches, however. Although Blizzard set up Battle.net servers dedicated to the Asian market, there were so many Korean players that the servers became overcrowded. This led a number of Korean players to play on the North American servers, causing overcrowding there, too.

To alleviate the problem, Blizzard announced in late June that it would add two new Asian Realms to Battle.net, bringing the total number of servers in the Asia gateway to 300. Blizzard has also expanded the Battle.net staff to provide better service. These measures seem to have licked the overcrowding problems—at least for now. With the release of the DIABLO II: LORD OF DESTRUCTION expansion, we may see even more players from around the world flock to Battle.net. It's a headache most game companies would love to have.

—Mark Asher

News Feed

PC GAME RENTALS

The era of online game rentals has arrived. Electronics Boutique offers 72-hour PC game rentals for $4.99 over the Internet. ALONE IN THE DARK was available for rent even before it was in stores, which the company claims was a first for a major release. Several other well-known titles are also available; **www.eb1.com**.

ATARI GAMES COMING TO CELL PHONES

You'll soon be able to play classic Atari games like Asteroids and Frogger on your cell phone. A U.K. developer, iFone, plans to release a dozen Java-compatible Atari games by the end of the year. Users who own a phone that supports Java MIDP version will be able to download the games for about 35 cents each.

ATARI UNREAL 2?

Infogrames confirmed that it will publish some of its top-tier games, such as the upcoming UNREAL games, under the Atari label. Infogrames obtained the Atari name as part of its acquisition of Hasbro last year. In an interview with trade publication *MCV*, Infogrames CEO Bruno Bonnell stated, "If Atari decided to launch a company today, it wouldn't do PONG; it would do a leading-edge game."

QUAKE II-POWERED SHORT WINS SHOWTIME AWARD

The Showtime Networks Alternative Media Festival recognized a short animated film created with the QUAKE II engine as Best of SHO and Best Experimental Short Film of 2000. The DICLan's Machinima short *Harah Wahed* grabbed the honors earlier this year in New York. The film took over two years to develop; see **www.inclan.com** for more.

LONGEST JOURNEY DEFIES LONG ODDS

The critically acclaimed adventure game THE LONGEST JOURNEY has sold 250,000 copies worldwide since it was released in the United States last November, according to its publisher. Funcom says 90,000 units were purchased in the United States alone—the best sales total in years for an adventure game (except the MYST titles). Funcom also publishes ANARCHY ONLINE, which launched in late June.

INDEPENDENT GAMES FESTIVAL

Organized by the Independent Computer Game Designers Association, the Independent Games Festival showcases the best independent games and game technology. Winners will be announced at the Game Developers Conference in March 2001. For more information, see **www.igf.com**.

EXPANSION IS THE PATH TO DOMINATION.
Yuri's Revenge, the ambitious expansion for Red Alert 2, features an entirely new side — the insidious psychic forces of Yuri. Mind-bending new units and structures will allow you to create unprecedented strategic possibilities. Is domination in your future? Find out today.
CALL 1-900-454-YURI
For entertainment purposes only. 45¢ per minute. TT phone required. Children under 18 must have parental permission. Westwood Studios™ 2400 N. Tenaya Way, Las Vegas, NV 89128 • 702.228.1999
• Wield the forbidden technologies of Yuri's army, turning your enemies' strengths against them.
• Inflict devastating new punishments upon your foes with new Allied and Soviet weapons.
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• New movies bring back your favorite characters - Yuri, Tanya, Romanov, President Dugan, Eva and more.
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YURI'S REVENGE
RED ALERT 2 EXPANSION

PLACE YOUR BETS

New online service lets players cash in on their 'skillz'

It launched May 14, 2001, without fanfare and with a name that betrayed nothing—Zoogi. But it turns out that Zoogi is a service that takes gaming one step closer to the big leagues by letting you put your money where your big, trash-talking mouth is. It works like this: Thousands of gamers bet up to $50 on a match (charged on their credit cards), then play for the pot. Everything from backgammon to QUAKE is fair game. Zoogi polices the action using an eBay-like system in which players earn credibility ratings, and by pointing fingers at cheaters in an online forum.

Despite the way Zoogi tosses around the terms "bet" and "wager," this is not gambling, according to Tal Shaked, business development manager, because these aren't games of chance. Nevertheless, Shaked is optimistic about the recent trend-setting approval of online gambling in Nevada. "Directly, [the law] does not affect our activities," Shaked says. "Indirectly, however, any opening up of Internet gaming activity is certainly good."

Zoogi plans to raise the maximum bet allowed and to add support for tournament wagers over the next few months.

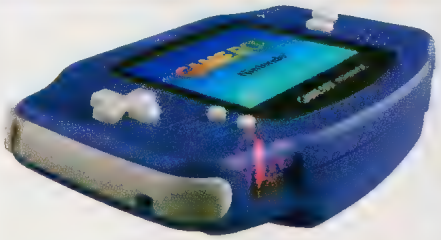
It sounds like good business: It doesn't rely on online advertising for revenue; it gives companies a chance to make money by sponsoring matches and collecting a cut of the take; and it gives players a jolt of excitement from making bets.

But not everyone likes the idea. The Cyberathlete Professional League, which organizes gaming competitions in the United States and Europe, "is opposed to any system that allows online betting for gamers," says founder Angel Munoz. He says that the odds of money talking to the dark side of someone's conscience are high. There's also the addictive nature of gambling to consider.

So Zoogi takes gaming another step toward becoming a real sport and an adults-only club. We've already got the babes and the egos. With the advent of friendly wagers, an arena already packed with ways to spend time and money adds a voracious sideline.

—Sandy Brundage

What's Hot



Game Boy Advance: With sales already approaching one million units, Nintendo's handheld looks to set new records.

ION Storm Austin: Warren Spector's studio survives intact, with THIEF III and DEUS EX II in the works.

Richard Garriott: His deal with Korean gaming company NCSoft puts Lord British back in action.

Cloudmakers: The Web-based mystery game for the movie *A.I.* managed to beat MAJESTIC at its own game.

Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within: The most incredible CGI you've ever seen.

What's Not

EA.com: It took three years and $250 million to build a site nobody likes?

ION Storm Dallas: Eidos shuts down the biggest waste of money since, well, EA.com.

NCSoft: Illegal copies of STARCRAFT land NCSoft in deep kimchee.

Xbox: Early enthusiasm is gone, and we've heard rumors of people canceling their preorders—ouch!

REALITY CHECK

It's a season of mediocrity. This month's standouts include the Castro sim TROPICO and, surprisingly, MYST III: EXILE. The grumps at *CGW* weren't wowed by the latest MYST slide show and its hydroelectric contraptions, but the rest of the world seemingly can't get enough. SUMMONER and SEA DOGS were also a couple of relative bright spots in a dull summer. Now you see why we're playing BEJEWELED.

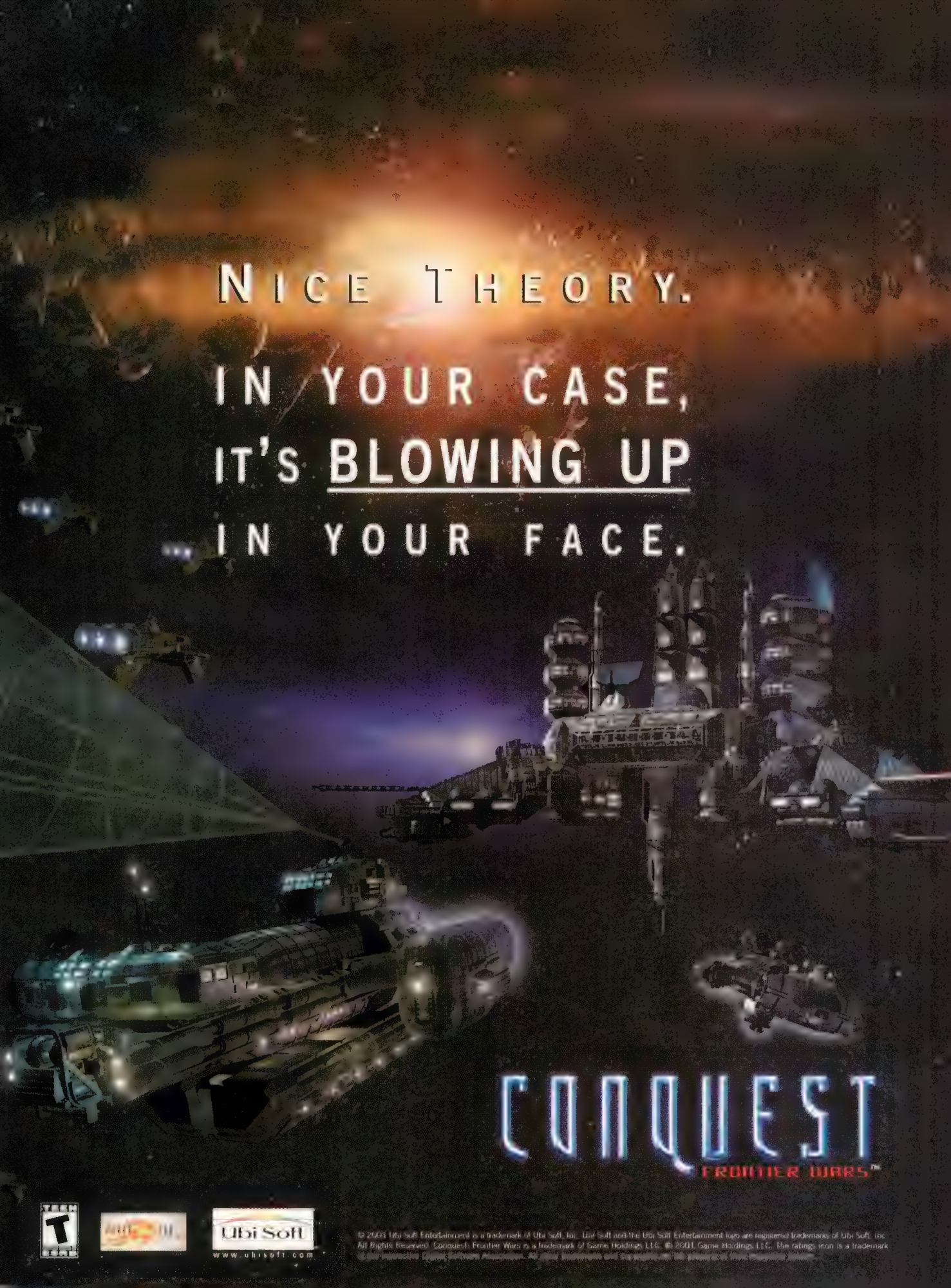
	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamespot	Adrenaline Vault	GameRankings.com
Age of Sail II	B-	D	D	B-	C	C+
Evil Dead: Hail to the King	F	C	D	D-	*	C-
Myst III: Exile	D	A-	B+	A-	*	B+
Sea Dogs	B+	B+	B-	B	B-	B
Summoner	B+	B+	B-	B	*	B
The Ward	D	C	D-	C	*	C
Traffic Giant	C-	B-	D	*	*	C
Tropico	B-	B	B+	A-	B+	B+
Ultima Online: Third Dawn	D-	B	*	C+	*	C+
X-COM Enforcer	D	C	C-	C	B-	C+

** no rating available at press time*

The Big Bang Theory
AT THIS VERY SECOND
THE UNIVERSE
IS RAPIDLY
EXPANDING.
08:18:01:13

When you're commanding a fleet this big, the next Big Bang just might be you. Conquest: Frontier Wars puts you in the galactic hot seat where you must deploy and control a massive starfleet across the universe. Don't let it collapse. Your fleet. Your fate.

- Oversee up to 16 interplanetary battle maps at once through the cunning use of wormholes
- Enter a new dimension of strategic possibilities with the supply line management system
- Command up to 6 highly intelligent fleet admirals who implement your orders, assess threats and react with organized tactics


NICE THEORY.
IN YOUR CASE,
IT'S BLOWING UP
IN YOUR FACE.
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ESRB
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PIPELINE

Establishing software release dates is as tricky as finding good lighting for playing your Game Boy Advance. These dates represent the best available information at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to: cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

Updates

PlanetSide: The physics system is being updated so that vehicles and people will behave realistically. The main focus now is adding functions such as buying stuff, destroying power generators, and manning gun turrets. The team is working on personal inventory and the various body armors, to boot.

Black Isle Studios: TORN: The main focus right now is on spells. Once the spell design is finished, the team can focus on implementing and animating them and making sure they work. The designers are also finalizing the dialogue and game flow for the first segment of the game.

Magic & Mayhem: The Art of Magic: Although the original design team folded, most of its members relocated and they are continuing to work on the game. All the scenarios are complete; attention has shifted to bug fixing.

Freedom Force: The Irrational team was on schedule as this title went alpha, and hence on track to actually make the game's scheduled Christmas release date.

Might & Magic IX: Writ of Fate: All we know is that this MIGHT & MAGIC title will use the LithTech engine. Heck, even the subtitle might change.

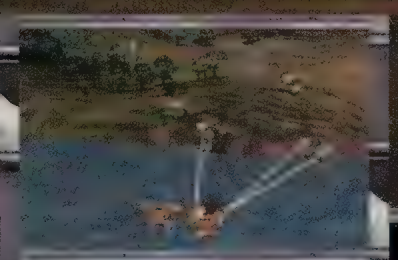
Motor City Online: EA is now accepting applications to beta test this cars-on-the-Internet scheme. We might actually see this title before the year is over!

ION Austin: ION has licensed the UNREAL engine. That's no big surprise, as DEUS EX was an UNREAL-based game and it makes sense for DEUS EX 2 to follow suit. But this implies that THIEF III will now use the UNREAL engine as well. Hmm!

Age of Mythology		
Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne		
Aliens vs. Predator 2	Monolith	
Aquanox	Fishtank Interactive	
NEW Arx Fatalis	Fishtank Interactive	November 2001
Asheron's Call 2	Microsoft	
Battle Realms	Crave Entertainment	
Black Isle Studios: TORN	Interplay	Winter 2001
NEW Comanche 4	NovaLogic	
Combat Mission 2	Big Time Software	Fall 2001
Command & Conquer: Renegade		Summer 2001
NEW Conquest: Frontier Wars	UbiSoft	
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	
Dark Sector	Digital Extremes	
NEW Destroyer Command	UbiSoft	
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	
Disciples II: Dark Prophecy	Strategy First	
Dragon's Lair 3D	Blue Byte	Summer 2001
UPDATE Duke Nukem Forever	3D Realms	Winter 2001
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	
Earth & Beyond		Winter 2001
Elder Scrolls: Morrowind	Bethesda	Fall 2001
Empire Earth	Sierra	Fall 2001
Etherlords	Strategy First	November 2001
EverQuest: Shadows of Luclin	Verant	
Flight Simulator 2002	Microsoft	Fall 2001
Freedom Force		Winter 2001
Galactic Commander Online		
Global Operations		Winter 2001
Halo		
Heroes of Might & Magic IV		
Hidden & Dangerous 2		Winter 2001
NEW IL2 Sturmovik		
Magic & Mayhem: The Art of Magic		
Master of Orion 3	Infogrames	
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault		
NEW Midgard	Funcom	Summer 2002

NEW Might & Magic IX: Writ of Fate	3DO	
Motor City Online	Electronic Arts	Fall 2001
Myth III: The Wolf Age	G.O.D.	
Neverwinter Nights	Interplay	
Nexagon: The Pit	Strategy First	
O.R.B.	Strategy First	
Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	September 2001
PlanetSide	Verant	Summer 2002
UPDATE Pool of Radiance II	UbiSoft	
Project Eden	Eidos Interactive	Summer 2001
Rails Across America	Strategy First	
Red Faction		Fall 2001
Return to Wolfenstein	Activision	Fall 2001
UPDATE Rogue Spear: Black Thorn		
Sid Meier's Civilization III		
Sid Meier's SimGolf	Electronic Arts	Fall 2001
Sigma: The Adventures of Rex Chance	Microsoft	
NEW Silent Hunter II	UbiSoft	
SimsVille	Electronic Arts	
Sims Online	Electronic Arts	Summer 2002
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	Activision	Winter 2001
Sovereign	Sony Online Entertainment	
Spider-Man	Activision	
Star Trek: Borg Assimilator	Activision	Winter 2001
UPDATE Star Trek: Bridge Commander	Activision	Fall 2001
Star Wars: Galactic Battleground	LucasArts	Fall 2001
Star Wars: Galaxies	LucasArts	
Star Wars Jedi Outcast: Jedi Knight II		
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic		Fall 2002
Stronghold		October 2001
UPDATE Team Fortress 2	Sierra	
Thief III		Summer 2002
Throne of Darkness	Sierra	
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	UbiSoft	
Unreal II		
WarCraft III	Blizzard	
Zoo Tycoon	Microsoft	Fall 2001

A UNIT OF 40 FOOT KILLING MACHINES IS ONLY DWARFED BY THE MAN WHO COMMANDS IT.



COMMANDER, YOUR MISSION IS SIMPLE: DISPATCH A COMPANY OF MECHWARRIORS INTO BATTLE TO DESTROY THE ENEMY. THEN SALVAGE THE REPAIRABLE 'MECHS AND USE THEM TO BOLSTER YOUR FUTURE ATTACKS. STAY FOCUSED ON YOUR STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE AND TACTICAL SKILLS THAT GUARANTEE A VICTORIOUS CAMPAIGN. AND REMEMBER, IF YOU CAN SHIFT THE BALANCE OF POWER AND CHANGE HISTORY, THEN YOU WILL TRULY BE A GREAT COMMANDER.

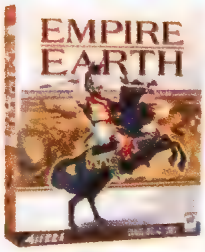
MECHCOMMANDER 2

THE MECHWARRIOR® GAME OF TACTICAL COMMAND

T TEEN VIOLENCE ESRB

Microsoft

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PREORDERS



Empire Earth *(SIERRA STUDIOS)* This game promises to be the premier historical real-time strategy game, as accessible as Age of Empires, but with far more excitement and depth, offering players unprecedented freedom to customize both the historical scope of their game and the character of their civilizations.

Everquest: Shadows of Luclin *(VERANT INTERACTIVE)* With a new territory to explore, with it's own secrets, artifacts, and unique monsters. new game elements, including a new player race and class, plus an upgraded 3-D graphics engine, this expansion will open a new world to players–literally!

Civilization III *(INFOGRAMES)* A whole new dimension of strategy and possibility that was absent in past Civilization games is created by integrating the concept of culture into the Civilization universe. Brute military force is no longer the only option you have for conquering enemy civilizations.

Return to Castle Wolfenstein *(ACTIVISION)* id's Quake III graphics engine brings the gloomy castle and its evil denizens to life. You'll play as B.J. Blazkowicz, a covert Allied supersoldier with a massive chip on his shoulder and an Indiana Jones-sized hatred for Nazis, as he infiltrates and brings down the evil castle.

Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds *(LUCASARTS)* The destiny of a galaxy hangs in the balance, and you're in command of campaigns that will determine the final outcome of the Galactic Civil War. This is an epic real-time strategy set against a backdrop of the entire Star Wars saga.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES

MS Flight Simulator Pro 2002 *(MICROSOFT)* Flight Simulator 2002 is the new edition of Microsoft's highly realistic, graphically advanced flight simulator, the best-selling PC flight simulation game ever and includes real-time, interactive Air Traffic Control (ATC), stunning new scenery and visual effects.

Dungeon Siege *(MICROSOFT)* Plunge into a continuous 3-D fantasy world on a quest to stop a mysterious evil that has been unleashed. This is an action fantasy role-playing game that combines the immersive elements of a role-playing game with the intensity of a real-time strategy game.

Commandos 2 *(EIDOS)* A tactical action-strategy game set against a World War II backdrop. Take control of an elite group of gritty soldiers who must venture deep into enemy territory and utilize their combined expertise to complete a series of mission-based objectives.

Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura *(SIERRA STUDIOS)* Welcome to the land of Arcanum, where magic and sorcery hold equal sway with technology and science. An adventurer among dwarves, humans, orcs, and elves might just as easily wield a flintlock pistol as a flaming sword.

Throne of Darkness *(SIERRA STUDIOS)* Japanese mythology and fast-paced multiplayer mayhem combine to make this game a must-have title for action-oriented RPG fans. You control a team of seven unique samurai against a massive single player experience or in online cooperative and competitive play modes.

All available now at the Computer & Video Games store at

amazon.com.

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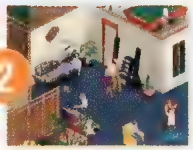
TOP 20

Top-Selling PC Games in May

The Sims: House Party (Electronic Arts) $30

[illegible] party [illegible] of [illegible] the [illegible] ing [illegible] of those wacky virtual people you call the Sims parents. With all the people you've been trying out [illegible] virtual parties are probably the only real [illegible] having.

The Sims (Electronic Arts) $40



This game's got legs like Anna Kournikova. Most hardcore gamers couldn't care less, but the other 249 million people in the country are suddenly interested in a computer game. We couldn't be happier, and neither could Will Wright.

Black & White (Electronic Arts) $41

Call it the MYST factor—sometimes people don't really know why they want something, they just have to see what all the fuss is about. The EA merchandising machine certainly helps, too.

4	**Myst III: Exile** (UbiSoft)	$45	
5	**The Sims: Livin' Large Expansion** (Electronic Arts)	$27	
6	**Roller Coaster Tycoon** (Infogrames)	$26	
7	**Sim Theme Park** (Electronic Arts)	$20	
8	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** (Microsoft)	$40	
9	**Tropico** (Gathering of Developers)	$40	
10	**Diablo II** (Vivendi)	$38	
11	**Tribes 2** (Vivendi)	$45	
12	**Myst III: Exile Collector's Edition** (UbiSoft)	$60	
13	**Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2** (Electronic Arts)	$45	
14	**Backyard Baseball** (Humongous)	$28	
15	**Lego Island II** (Lego Media)	$20	n/a
16	**Hoyle Casino 2001** (Vivendi)	$35	n/a
17	**SimCity 3000** (Electronic Arts)	$15	
18	**Serious Sam** (Gathering of Developers)	$20	
19	**NASCAR Racing 4** (Vivendi)	$50	
20	**Age of Empires II: The Conquerors** (Microsoft)	$30	

Based on sales figures for May 2001. Source: NPD INTELECT Market Tracking

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

5

Sept. 1996

Five years ago flight sims were so hot, there were *four* of them for the F-22. Maybe if there had been only one, it would have actually sold. This issue also boasted stories on playing games like DUKE NUKEM 3D and MECHWARRIOR 2 over a LAN. Playing multiplayer QUAKE was simply a matter of "editing the Q95.BAT file to enable QUAKE to talk to Windows 95's TCP/IP stack." Or, you could load a DOS TCP/IP stack that was "notorious for being a royal pain." Most gamers said "screw it" and waited for QUAKE II.

10

Sept. 1991

Flipping through this issue would give long-time gamers plenty to reminisce about. Past ads for LEMMINGS, ULTIMA VII, and LEISURE SUIT LARRY IN THE LAND OF THE LOUNGE LIZARDS, after the articles about NHL HOCKEY (the original), the demise of Cinemaware and wargames, and how to do instrument-only landings in FLIGHT SIMULATOR 4, at the end of the issue is a small paragraph inducting THEIR FINEST HOUR into the Hall of Fame.

15

Sept. 1986

Wow, we forgot how crappy computer games looked on the C64 and Apple II. The Game Boy Advance has more power than PCs did back then. Included in the issue is an ad reading, "A strange woman wants to marry you. An unknown man is trying to kill you. The State of Texas wants you for murder. But that's not your problem. Your real problem is...AMNESIA." EA touted the text adventure as "written by award-winning novelist Thomas Disch—not a team of computer programmers."

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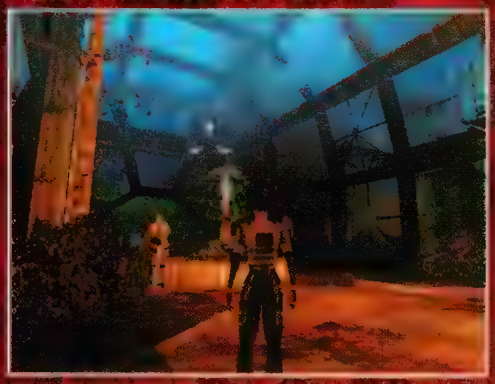
Due to severe overpopulation, the Earth's diameter is increasing with the growth of towering mega-cities. As civilization climbs high into the sky, it buries below its refuse; criminals, the wretched and the deranged. Now, amidst reports of violence and atrocity in lower levels, a service crew has disappeared without a trace.



Lead a team of specialists into an abyss of vast caverns, snake-like passageways and luring dead-ends.

Tread lightly. The depths belong to twisted cults, mutants and hideous creatures that were never meant to exist.

Play in single player mode, or with up to 4 others in multiplayer.

PROJECT EDEN

www.projectedengame.com

Defender of the Crown

BY GEORGE JONES

Cinemaware recreates the magic of its glory years

South of San Francisco, a once-great game company stirs. The location—an industrial-looking office complex across the street from an abandoned, five-screen drive-in theater—is entirely appropriate. As is the international cast of characters that corporate necromancer Lars Fuhrken-Batista has assembled to recreate one of the great gaming companies of the 1980s.

Do you remember Cinemaware? If you've gotten into gaming in the last seven years, you probably don't. Much like the intriguing outdoor multiplex its new employees pay homage to every day, Cinemaware was once ahead of its time. What they did—bolt storyline into action games—is considered old hat now. But fifteen years ago, it was miraculous. Gamers still get nostalgic when they contemplate games like DEFENDER OF THE CROWN and TV SPORTS FOOTBALL.

So how do you go about resuscitating a defunct gaming company? First, you salvage it from bankruptcy court. You get the blessing of the old company's employees, which wasn't difficult, since many of them were proud of their past accomplishments. Then you get funding from venture capitalists (in this case, from European sources).

You then build a new staff by gathering eleven of the biggest game fans and dreamers in the gaming industry, people who cut their teeth at places like Accolade, UbiSoft, Activision, and SSI. But most importantly, you need developers who understand what Cinemaware stood for back in the day: lots of decision-making, non-linear play, diverse action sequences, and a consistently cool unique style.

You should also create a new version of DEFENDER OF THE CROWN. The jewel in the old Cinemaware's crown, this game helped define the company by capturing the atmosphere of a swashbuckling medieval epic: castle sieges, jousting tournaments, fair maidens, and a plot that connected it all together, while still allowing the gamer to play an entire game in a single sitting. The new Cinemaware has that covered: ROBIN HOOD: DEFENDER OF THE CROWN, a PS2/PC title scheduled for release sometime next year, is the company's first attempt at recreating its predecessors' magic.

To play Shockwave versions of classic Cinemaware games like DEFENDER OF THE CROWN and WINGS, visit www.cinemaware.com

But this isn't a story about any particular game. It's a story about a fledgling game company trying to pay homage through reconstructing a legend. It's about the crackle of energy inside the new Cinemaware offices as a new game shop combines the aggressive thrill of the new, reverence for the old, and no small disdain for the redundant, repetitive nature of current games.

Spend enough time with these guys talking about their inspiration (METAL GEAR SOLID, KARATEKA, and that weird '80s break-dancing game from Epyx) and the current state of game design ("the principle of editing doesn't exist at all"), and you start to believe that these guys—once they get a publisher—might actually be able to accomplish their goal of reintroducing innovation to gaming.

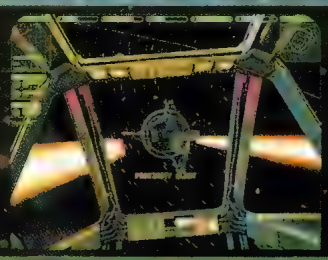
Who knows? Maybe in five years, they'll own that five-screen drive-in theater across the street. CGW

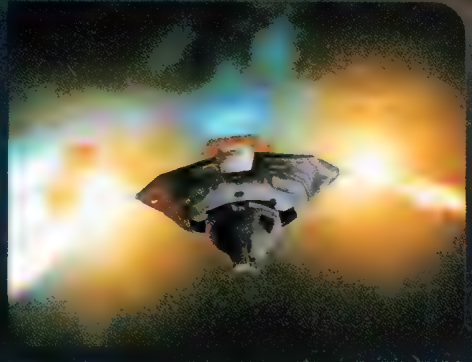
Blast from the past: For many gamers, Cinemaware represented the apex of the golden age of gaming—an era of unbridled creativity and innovation.

Infinite Space, Advanced Weaponry, Impossible Odds.

The war begins this August!

- Lead an epic battle in the next chapter of the award-winning space simulation, Independence War
- Experience immersing game play, stunning graphics and more action
- Compete online – Internet and LAN support for up to 8 players
- Explore the vast depths of the universe spanning 16 star systems





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Throne of Darkness

by Robert Coffey

Fighting to be king of the action RPGs

You could accuse Click Entertainment and THRONE OF DARKNESS of employing blatant imitation in an effort to leech away some of the DIABLO series' success and profits. But that wouldn't be fair, considering that the development team's core consists of guys who created the first DIABLO. They're just building on what they started.

GENRE: RPG • RELEASE DATE: 09 01
PUBLISHER: Sierra
DEVELOPER: Click Entertainment
CONTACT: sierrastudios.com/games/throneofdarkness/

And what they started—or helped to start, anyway—was the devilishly addicting action RPG, a hack 'n' slash clickfest that obsessed gamers with the promise of just one more cool thing dangling tantalizingly a bit beyond their reach. THRONE OF DARKNESS expands upon that concept, following the reasoning that if one virtual carrot dancing at the end of a digital stick is good, then bunches of cyber-carrots bobbing at the ends of several imaginary sticks of varying lengths are exponentially better. The developers have pursued this strategy most obviously by upping the character ante—instead of playing as one character in THRONE's mythical Japanese setting, you'll steer parties of up to four members drawn from a pool of seven.

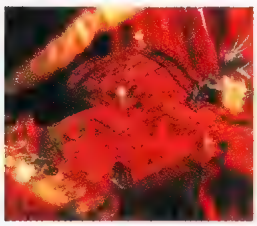
Every character will specialize: the Brick will pummel enemies with brute force; the Wizard will cast primarily offensive spells; the Priest will deal principally in protective and curative magic. Toss in the Archer, Swordsman, Ninja, and Leader and you have a pretty standard mix. With such a traditional complement of player characters, how will THRONE distinguish itself?

Tactics, for one thing. With up to four characters for players to command at any one time, THRONE includes a Tactics editor that allows players to assign positions, aggressive or defensive stances, primary attacks, and so on. It sounds complicated,

Beautifully rendered gameworlds, colorful characters, and great spell and lighting effects will make THRONE OF DARKNESS one of the prettiest games of 2001.

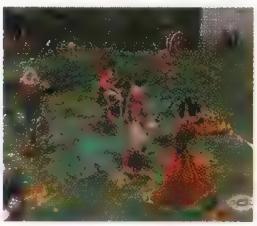
And in This Corner...

THRONE OF DARKNESS won't be the only game competing for your money and DIABLO II's crown. These are the other contenders:



Diablo II: Expansion Set

As reigning action-RPG champion, DIABLO II has the luxury of waiting to see if it can be toppled from its throne. We're thinking it can be. While the LORD OF DESTRUCTION expansion set addresses gamers' biggest gripe about the title by upping the resolution to a much easier on the eyes 800x600, our extensive playtesting of the beta did not leave us overwhelmed. The new Druid class was our favorite—it's very flexible and can be played as a shape-shifting tank (think werebear) or as a nature-oriented Necromancer summoning creatures and dishing out some truly potent elemental spells. But the new Assassin class left us cold—the martial arts and charge-up skills this character promised just weren't very rewarding. Sure, DIABLO II was a huge hit, but practically a year later we've got to wonder: Are two new classes and a fifth act going to be enough?



Dungeon Siege

One of our 10 Best Games of E3, DUNGEON SIEGE looks better and better every time we see it. Slated for a fall release, this hack 'n' slasher is the best-looking game of its kind and wins some major points for its user-friendliness and flexibility. Much of the tedium of RPGs—constant inventory slot management, long load times, finicky character restrictions, and so on—has been either eliminated or rethought in order to let gamers just sit down and play the damn thing the way they want to. Want to hold on to every item you find? Get a mule and load those suckers up. Tired of playing as a spellcaster? Grab a sword and start thwacking the baddies—you'll get better at it, I promise. And there's no waiting for levels to load. None. Zero. With DUNGEON SIEGE, Gas Powered Games just might have gotten Blizzard's number.

Body parts and blood aplenty will keep THRONE OF DARKNESS from being displayed in the kiddie section of the mall.

Your party will venture outdoors to battle mythical creatures such as these, and—our favorite—the NeanderSkull.

but in practice the editor works like a dream, thanks in large part to the sharp character AI. Even playing the game in its current pre-alpha state, I was struck by how intelligently the various characters healed themselves, moved out of range, and responded to threats, hewing to their tactical stance only as long as it made sense to do so. In any given situation, the best man for a particular job immediately did it. But will this slightly hands-off approach, coupled with the chaos of real-time multi-character combat, distance players from the action? Only time will tell.

THRONE OF DARKNESS also features a greater variety of magical items, and you'll have a direct hand in their creation. Players give found items to a blacksmith, who basically cashes them in for magic points. Once you're satisfied with the number of points you've banked, you order a special item and the blacksmith creates it for you, incorporating gems and such that you donate to the cause. Ideally, this method should alleviate the troublesome lack of useful late-game items that DIABLO II suffers from.

Graphically, THRONE OF DARKNESS' crisp presentation trumps DIABLO II. The characters are rich and colorful, the animations fluid, the spell effects razzle-dazzle, the environments painstakingly designed. But some of this might work against the game—sure, the enemies are gorgeous and deadly, but we wonder how engaging the predominantly human adversaries we saw will be over the course of a 40- to 50-hour game. And while the deliberately built levels allow the designers to stage battles and game moments, the lack of the DIABLO games' random maps of might reduce THRONE's replayability—especially when you consider that you'll have access to all character classes in every game.

Still, THRONE OF DARKNESS is offering so many twists on the action-RPG formula (including an online multiplayer mode in which you become the enemy you defeated in single-player) that we can't help but look forward to its release. CGW

The Tactics editor on the left side of this screenshot lets you set stances and positions for your entire party. The colored discs on the right show where your characters will wind up if you rotate the formation.

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

by John Houlihan

To the republic, for which we stand

High above Berezina plaza, two soldiers guard a government helicopter.

Ambitious. Visionary. Unique. These are just some of the many superlatives that have been applied to Elixir Studios' REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION. Now, after almost two and a half years of solid development, we are finally starting to see why. REPUBLIC could offer a new vision for a genre that seems stuck in something of a decline.

GENRE: Strategy • RELEASE DATE: Q2 02
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Elixir Studios
CONTACT: www.elixir-studios.co.uk

The revolution began in 1999 when Demis Hassabis, a Cambridge graduate, three-time Mind Olympics champion, and ex-Bullfrog Studios programmer, left Peter Molyneux's BLACK & WHITE development team to set up Elixir Studios and begin work on a strategy game that would be revolutionary in every sense of the word.

The result, REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION, is set just after the end of the Cold War amid the chaotic breakup of the Soviet Union. It casts you as the leader of one of 16 factions in the fictional nation of Novistrana. Your aim is deceptively simple: Accumulate power, influence, and authority until you're a big enough player to manipulate your way to the presidency. The concept is intriguing, but it's REPUBLIC's vast scope, advanced AI, minutely modeled gameworld and free-form play that has attracted the interest of strategy fans and some of the world's foremost game designers.

Totality Reality

Modeling every building, vehicle, and person in an entire country for real-time play is such an audacious undertaking that it forced Elixir to spend a fair portion of its initial development time building Totality, REPUBLIC's proprietary game engine. The design document describes a system capable of unlimited scale changes and able to cope with scenes of unlimited complexity. The result, even

A Practical Demonstration of Power

What makes REPUBLIC so fascinating is the interaction between your decisions and the individual citizens who inhabit the gameworld. Here's one scenario:

Three days into the game, during a survey of the city, I notice a rival faction's priest preaching to citizens in the town square. I certainly don't want that. After investigating the priest thoroughly, I decide a bit of bribery is in order. One clandestine meeting at a secluded park bench later, the priest is 3,000 rubles richer and suddenly no longer delivering his daily sermon.

Players favoring an "iron fist in a velvet glove" style might decide on a more aggressive approach and sic an ex-boxer on the holy man. One beating later, the visibly shaken priest is not too keen on preaching anymore. You can also tweak individual settings to determine how severely he gets roughed up.

In some cases, the priest's unique AI personality might mean that even a severe beating won't deter him. You can organize a hit to silence him forever, but its success will ultimately depend on factors such as the skill of your assassin and the level of protection offered by the priest's newly acquired bodyguard.

The Totality engine really brings home the grim atmosphere of life in the newly post-Cold War Soviet Union.

given the increasing sophistication of modern 3D techniques, is extremely impressive.

REPUBLIC features 16 towns and four major cities in addition to Novistrana's capital, and spans a vast six million square kilometers of gameworld, all portrayed in the most immaculate detail. Hovering disembodied over Berezina, one of the game's first cities, you can zoom ever closer, picking out first road systems and parks, then individual buildings, cars, and people, until finally you're at street level and able to see individual leaves on a tree. The unprecedented level of detail creates a complex environment that has an authentic real-world feel—you can almost smell the smoke from the industrial plants and feel the despair emanating from the grim, gray Soviet tower blocks.

Populating this highly original world are more than one million REPUBLIC citizens. Each possesses a unique AI model and personality, and will respond to your actions, dictates, and whims accordingly. Click on any one of the 3D character models striding confidently along the streets and you get a breakdown of who they are, what they do, and where they stand on the big issues of the day. Understanding, satisfying, and subtly influencing these people's needs and desires while fending off fellow power brokers will ultimately be your route to the top.

Greasing the Wheels of Your Political Machine

While opinion pollsters sometimes get it wrong, you won't have any problems gauging the mood of the people. Eight fundamental real-world issues (government, politics, religion, morality, economics, violence, ethnic tolerance, and international relations) are painstakingly tracked in relation to both your citizens' concerns and your personal political style. Fascist, communist, entrepreneur, military dictator, religious zealot—how you choose to satisfy your burning ambition is entirely up to you.

You'll exert influence over the citizens via an innovative actions system, which currently lets players employ up to 256 different strategies that are played out in impressive in-game cinematics. Different circles of powerful allies open up different paths of influence. If you're a criminal mastermind, violence and coercion will be the tools of your trade, while consummate politicians will thrive on manipulating the media and rousing the masses. Bribery, intimidation, assassination, and even charity are just some of your available options, paid for with the hard currency of force, money, and influence. Elixir also has developed complex scripting routines that will allow it to add actions at will, so the variety of ways to affect the gameworld could eventually be huge.

It's not often that a game representing a genuine leap forward in terms of design and vision come along, but if REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION continues along its current path, it could provide the push forward the strategy genre needs. We could be looking at a landmark moment in strategy gaming. CGW

Thousands of unique REPUBLIC citizens go about their daily business.

IL-2 Sturmovik

GENRE: Simulation • RELEASE DATE: 11/01
PUBLISHER: UbiSoft
DEVELOPER: 1C:Maddox Games
CONTACT: www.bluebyte.net/

The IL-2 Sturmovik was by far Russia's most successful World War II aircraft. In fact, more IL-2s were produced during the war than any other plane. The original name, Shturmovik (changed in the game to Sturmovik for ease of pronunciation and distribution internationally), literally means "ground attack" and is as much an epithet for the IL-2 as the name Stuka was for the German Junkers 87. The German soldiers had their own name for the Russian ground-pounder: Schwarz Tod, or "Black Death." Although few IL-2s were available for frontline duty when Germany first invaded Russia in June 1941, the plane proved its value even in limited numbers by hindering German armored columns in World War II's infamous Eastern Front.

Russia's IL-2 Sturmovik was the World War II equivalent of the modern A-10: a tank's worst nightmare.

From Russia, With Love
by Gordon Berg

Better Late Than Never

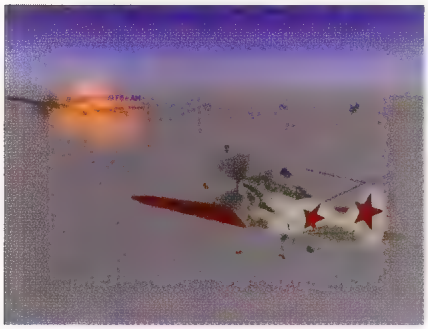
Years in development, IL-2 STURMOVIK was originally scheduled to ship in March 2001. The release date slipped to this November, however, after an AI programmer became ill and the publisher changed from BlueByte to UbiSoft (this explains why the current beta copy I have is fairly stable and is missing only the full campaigns). The entire development team resides in Russia, and who better to make a Russian flight sim than Russians? Lead developer Oleg Maddox and his crew at 1C:Maddox games have access to design documents and technical data available only from the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, veterans of the conflict have been brought in as consultants, providing a high level of realism and authenticity. And many members of the development team have flown real aircraft so that they can better re-create the feeling of flight.

Surprisingly, the IL-2 is an easy plane to fly in the game, even at the highest of realism settings. That's because the IL-2 reportedly was easy to fly in real life. Maddox is of the opinion that too many flight sims are needlessly difficult when it comes to the flight modeling. What's not easy—at least not for me—is shooting down other airplanes. That's partly due to the fantastic defensive behavior of the enemy AI, and partly due, perhaps, to my extremely poor aim (I turned off the realism on the gunnery and still had a hard time hitting enemy planes).

Although IL-2's developers originally envisioned Russia's famous ground-attack plane as the only player-flyable aircraft in the game, they ended up producing a much larger simulation. You can fly not only seven variants of the IL-2, but also four other planes and their variants: the LaGG-3, the Mig-3, the lend-lease P-39, and the German Bf-109. You can even man the rear gunner position that appeared in the later IL-2 models. And plans call for including additional player-flyable aircraft later on, such as the Yak, the Focke-Wulf, and of course, the Stuka.

Eye in the Sky

IL-2 looks like it will be as pretty as it is detailed. Although DirectX 8 support is included, the DX8 graphics fare poorly when compared with the stunning OpenGL implementation. The cockpits are



IL-2 will let you fly underrepresented aircraft, such as the LaGG-3 and the MiG-3, both significant players in the Great War.

The damage model is fairly complex, as demonstrated by this 109's wing blowing apart.

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Turn On the Fun

Some cities in IL-2 will contain buildings numbering well into the thousands.

highly detailed and evidently painstakingly researched. Battle damage shows internal structures and produces gaping holes you can see through (just like in Hasbro's B-17). As for the clouds, I don't think I've ever seen them rendered this realistically—or this effectively. Several times I chased a plane only to lose it once it got into a nearby cloud. Other atmospheric effects include contrails, all sorts of inclement weather, and even the ability to navigate by the stars at night.

Since much of IL-2 is about ground attacks, what happens on the ground is just as interesting as what happens in the air. Looking down, pilots can see forests, entire cities, and men abandoning their vehicles as their column gets strafed. Those interested in over-the-water missions will be able to fly the torpedo-carrying variant of the IL-2 and attack ships in the Crimean Sea.

Show Me the Way to Berlin

Campaigns will range from 1941 Smolensk to 1945 Berlin. Although they're not precisely "dynamic campaigns" (a vague term if there ever was one), the campaigns will offer some dynamic aspects in conjunction with scripted events, along with branching based on performance. From what I have seen so far, no mission plays out the same way twice. The quick mission-builder is easy to use and lets you set up all sorts of engagements, while the full mission-builder offers far greater control over actions and waypoints.

Although the included campaigns won't accommodate cooperative multiplay, users can make their own cooperative missions using the mission-builder. Multiplayer over the Internet, hosted by Blue Byte's Game Channel, will allow 32 players to fly in dogfight mode and up to 16 players in co-op mode. All combat can be recorded via "track" files and later re-edited for a more cinematic effect.

Stalled Sturmovik

Admirable as Maddox's efforts to provide realism are, let's hope the final act of quality control comes in the form of cleaning up the in-game text. It's in passable English, but obviously a poor translation: charming and quaint perhaps, but it detracts from the game. Even the radio chatter, heard completely in Russian, is often translated as nothing more than a few hackneyed phrases repeated over and over. The view options out the cockpit windows seem limited as well (my hat views didn't work and I had to program the stick manually)—it wouldn't hurt if 1C:Maddox Games took a page out of EUROPEAN AIR WAR's book and supported better view modes. IL-2 will undergo some external beta testing, so maybe some of these issues will be addressed before it is released. Many games aren't even tested thoroughly (let alone extensively) before they're released, so this is a great step in the right direction.

Obviously Maddox didn't get the memo that said flight sims are dead. Or perhaps he did, but simply crumpled it up and threw it into the circular file along with his copy of Marx. The dedication that's gone into IL-2 so far is reminiscent of the sort of effort that once made flight sims the most popular of genres. CGW

Warning: Antiaircraft guns can be hazardous to your health.

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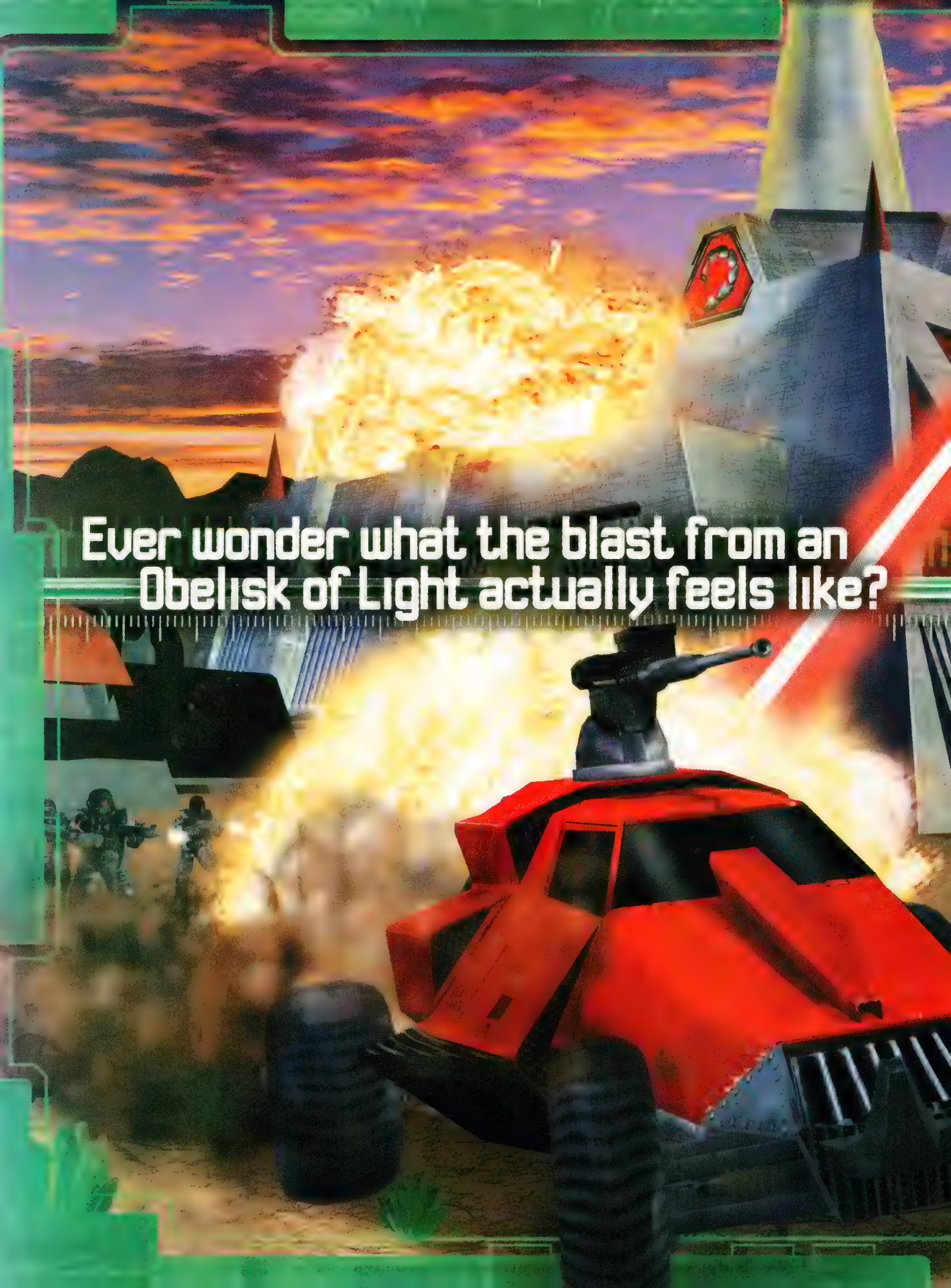
Ever wanted to grind the
gears of a Nod Buggy?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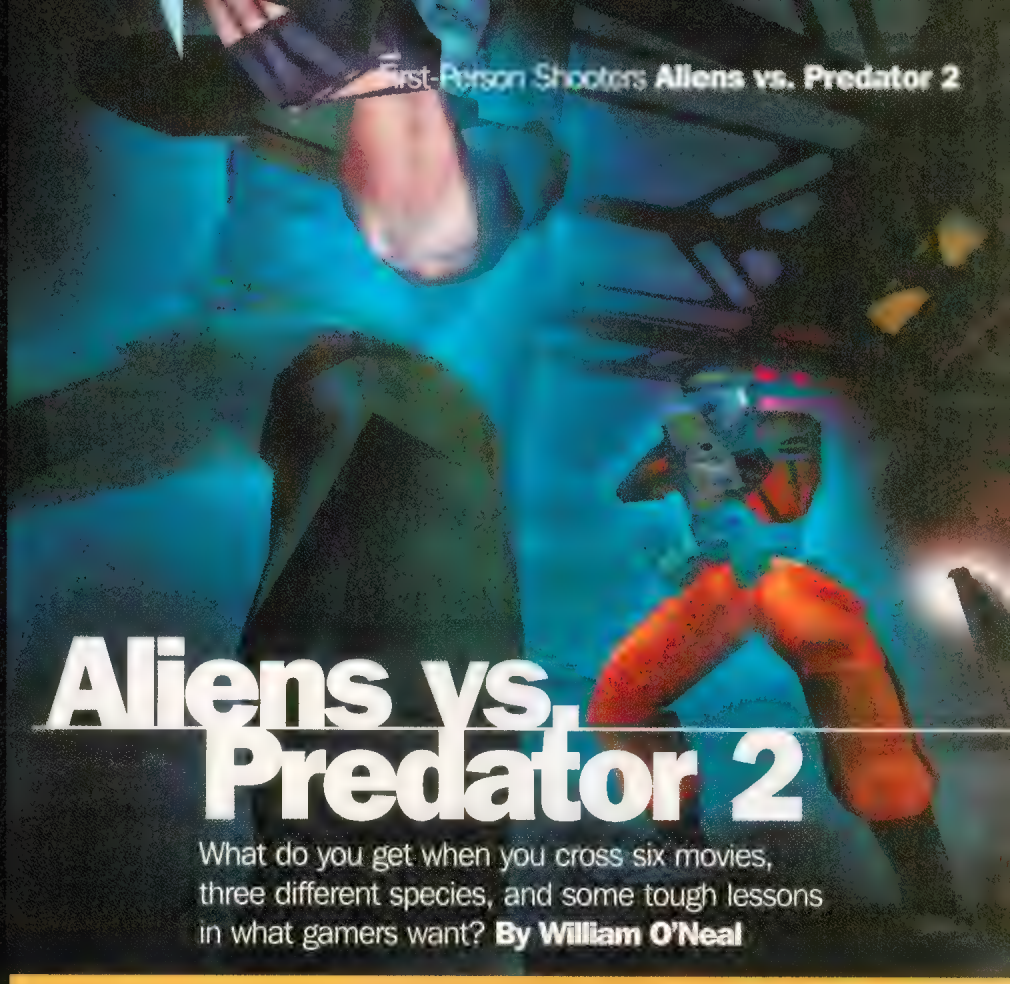
Trigger Happy

IT'S BEEN THREE YEARS SINCE HALF-LIFE BLEW THE FIRST-PERSON GENRE WIDE OPEN. Now, finally, the next generation is about to explode.

CGW got hands-on with all of 'em—and **WE LIKED WHAT WE SAW.**

HALF-LIFE is dead. Well, actually, no it isn't. Valve's seminal, ground-breaking shooter is alive and well in the form of add-ons and mods like COUNTER-STRIKE. But it is becoming dated, as are all the other giants of the genre. Yes, games in all the biggest franchises—QUAKE, DUKE NUKEM, UNREAL, and HALF-LIFE—are on the way, but it'll be a while before we get to play them.

And like you, we're impatient. We want to shoot things on our PCs and we want to do it now. Fortunately, there's an entirely new wave of first-person shooters actually nearing completion—shooters that have absorbed the lessons taught by HALF-LIFE and offer the kind of transfixing and immersive experiences that will move the genre forward. Over these 19 pages, CGW gets hands-on with all of them, and tells you why the genre has never looked better.



Aliens vs. Predator 2

What do you get when you cross six movies, three different species, and some tough lessons in what gamers want? **By William O'Neal**

Game development seems to get more complicated by the fiscal quarter. Raking in billions of dollars a year, the gaming business is no longer about a couple of guys with skill and a lot of free time, toiling away in their garage on a labor of love. Nowadays, games are put out by huge multinational conglomerates with shareholders to think about.

What does this mean to gamers like you and me? It means many factors determine which games are made, not the least of which are marketing and cross-promotional opportunities, as well as assurances that the game will have a "hook." And what game has a more certain hook than a sequel to a title developed from already proven movie franchises? Thus we have ALIENS VS. PREDATOR 2 (AvP2).

Life Lessons

That said, building a successful game on a movie franchise has always been a hit-or-miss enterprise: Think LucasArts. Kirkland, Washington–based developer Monolith is hoping with AvP2 to make a game that not only leverages its vaunted pedigree, but also is a great game in its own right. According to William Westwater, AvP2's lead designer, "When we set out to make this game we brainstormed about what went right in the first game and what went wrong in the first game. And we identified three major things in the first game that didn't...um...pan out."

A game that's going to be a best-seller has to appeal to more than just core gamers, and Monolith understands that accessibility will be key. Regarding the first major issue with the original AvP, Westwater had this to say: "The overall learning curve of the first game was very steep for a lot of players. No one had ever played as an alien. No one had ever played a character that was able to run on walls. And no one had taken the first-person shooter and said, 'We don't have to present a game where you see the world only through human eyes.'"

As for the second issue, while Monolith thinks the original game captured the atmosphere of the films, Westwater says it "did so in a way that, over the whole span of the game, gave it a very claustrophobic feeling. So people reported back to us that after a while the game would get so intense that it was hard to keep on playing. And for some people that ended up driving them away."

"We identified things that we saw in the movies that made us think, 'I want to do that.'"

And third, the original game's lack of a compelling story left many people with few reasons to come back to it. "The story didn't come together for some people. I won't even say that—there was no story," Westwater jokes. "There was no story at all in the first game." David Stalker, the game's producer, replies, "That's not quite true. There was a very slim thread of a story. But it really was just a bunch of levels and we thought, hey, if we shuffle these suckers around, yeah that works. See? You go from here to there to there."

Applied Knowledge

Having taken stock of the mistakes made by its predecessor (the original AvP was developed by U.K.-based Rebellion), Monolith set up five goals that it felt it *had* to achieve, says Westwater.

The first was to better leverage the existing universes of the *Aliens* and *Predator* movies—in other words, to identify what made the original game feel like it was occurring in those worlds and what was missing. "For instance," Westwater says, "face-huggers. You saw them but you never were a face-hugger. You never were a chest-burster. You didn't experience being the different kinds of aliens; you were just a drone. We identified things that we saw in the movies that made us think, 'I want to do that! Or be that!'"

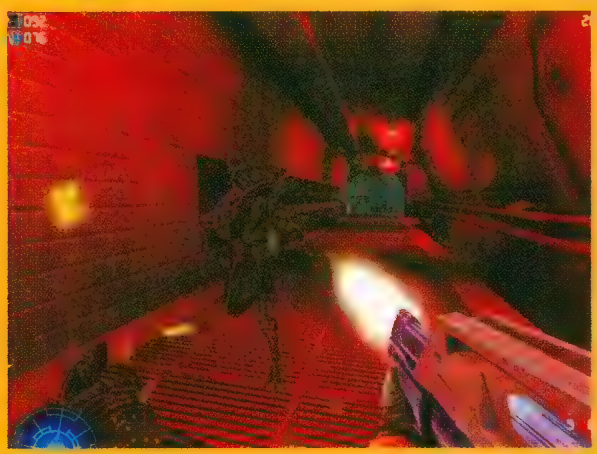
The second was leveling out the game's steep learning curve. According to Westwater, "We wanted to make sure that the game was set up so that you could ease your way into it without having to do a tutorial that would break the feeling of being an alien."

Rounding out the list were improving the game's graphics engine and making the environments look great, beefing up the story, and revamping the multiplayer option.

Oh Yeah, About That Story...

Call it the HALF-LIFE phenomenon, or chalk it up to what Monolith learned in developing last year's epic first-person shooter NO ONE LIVES FOREVER, but the company realizes that games need stories—and AvP2 actually has one. The challenge here was that Monolith had to develop three individual stories (one for the humans, one for the predators, and one for the aliens) and somehow connect them.

As expected, AvP2 will take place on LV1201. Each race will have entirely different reasons for being there and conundrums to deal with. Playing as a Marine on LV1201, your mission begins at a scientific facility where things have gone—you guessed it—awry. Of course, you'll have to battle aliens and a bunch of predators if you're going to save your leatherneck ass. As an alien you'll start off as a lowly face-hugger in search of a host. Once inside some poor human, you'll evolve into a chest-burster and eventually, a full-grown alien. Plot twists



With AvP2 Monolith went to some serious lengths to ensure that the aliens and predators won't just walk all over the USMCs.

Unlike its predecessor, AvP2 will boast a ton of outdoor arenas like this one. I think that's Ripley piloting the robot at the top.

This predator was about to open up a can-o-man on a Marine when he saw Danny Glover approaching. He decided to kill some aliens instead.

"Is that the new Plasma TK-925 assault rifle?" "It sure is...I picked it up at a gun show in Wyoming. Don't you just love that gun show loophole?"

will ensue as you realize that you're not the only alien on LV1201. As a predator you'll come to LV1201 for some good old-fashioned alien hunting, only to discover that there are humans there to boot. You'll also come to find out that a couple of your predator buddies have been taken captive by the humans and it's up to you to rescue them.

Monolith is weaving the three separate stories together in such a way that players will encounter the same situations from all three perspectives. For instance, you may play a sequence as a marine in which your base is being overrun by aliens, and then play that same sequence later from the side of the aliens.

What About My Buds?

While multiplayer in the original AVP was fun---once you finally got it going - Monolith realizes that getting into games needs to be easier if multiplayer is going to be sustainable, and the team is promising a completely revamped setup.

At the time of our interview, Monolith was able to talk about only a few of the multiplayer modes planned for the final game: Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, Hunt, and Survivor. One of the more promising is Hunt, in which everyone is after one target and only the target can score kills. If you kill

If this guy looks anything like Arnold Schwarzeneger, we've been assured that that's entirely coincidental.

the target, you become a target. "It's kind of like tag," says Westwater. You'll even be able to set it up so that there's a hunting race and a prey race.

More than anything else, the original AVP's lack of a Save Game feature caused a major outcry from gamers—Fox Interactive was forced to capitulate and add the feature in a patch. Producer Stalker recalls a typical email from an AVP player on the necessity of a Save Game feature: "'When I come home from work I have 10 minutes to play your [expletive deleted] game before my dinner is ready. I can't sit here and play your [expletive deleted] game for a half hour to get through a level, because my dinner's ready.' I would always reply, 'You could pause it and come back.' But we thought very carefully about it the second time." With AVP2, Monolith has worked hard to allow players the freedom to save games without—hopefully—taking out any of the terror.

Similar to the original AVP, when a Marine is staring down an alien at close range, it's safe to say that this is the last thing he's gonna see.

The Predator vs. Hardware Editor William O'Neal

Lifted (or stolen) straight from the pages of *Maxim*, we decided to do a little Head-to-Head matchup of our own, pitting one of the baddest mothers to grace the silver screen against easily the baddest mother walking the *CGW* halls.

Check the 'do

Dreadlocks that look like they're made of leather.	Dreadlocks that smell like a weekold Philly cheese steak.

Edge: Draw

Really bad temper

Able to rip the spines out of his foes' lifeless corpses.	Completely spineless.

Edge: The Predator

Pushes a fly whip

Drives a really cool space ship.	Drives a pickup truck.

Edge: Draw

What about the people?

Feared by millions.	Hated by millions, especially Republicans.

Edge: Draw

Packing heat

Runs with a lethal arsenal of futuristic sci-fi weapons.	Carries a Swiss Army knife.

Edge: The Predator

Run-in with an Arnold

Killed by Arnold Schwarzenegger.	Senior photo looks like Arnold Jackson.

Edge: O'Neal

What set you claim?

From some crazy-ass planet far, far away.	From Berkeley, California.

Edge: Draw

Critical weakness

Drawn to conflict.	Drawn to liquor.

Edge: O'Neal

And the winner is

With a score of 2-2, we have ourselves a tie! (But Wil, you would have lost in a landslide to the alien.)

How Does It Look?

We played a pre-pre-alpha version of AVP2, and we're happy to report that the game, even at this early stage, more than met our expectations—and it looked fantastic. While the hour or so that we played didn't give us a feel for how well the story has been crafted, the LithTech 2–based engine definitely rocks. The first game was extremely claustrophobic, but several of the multiplayer levels that we played took place in huge outdoor arenas. And Monolith has taken steps to balance play so that the predator isn't overwhelmingly dominant, as he was in the first game.

So go ahead and believe the hype this time: ALIENS VS. PREDATOR 2 has all the makings of a monster title. Following on the heels of last year's outstanding NO ONE LIVES FOREVER, AVP2 represents a solid leap forward for Monolith, putting the company in the forefront of major FPS developers. And the popularity of the franchise may bring Monolith the kind of success that has long been its due. A game in which we get to be an alien face-hugger? Do we really need to say this out loud? We're definitely putting this one on our Christmas wish lists.

Developer: **Monolith Productions**
Publisher: **Sierra/Fox Interactive**
Release Date: **Q4 2001**
Website: **www.lith.com**

Return to Castle Wolfenstein

Return to classic gameplay in this Nazi hunt. By Thierry Nguyen

You find yourself cold, alone, yet struck with a bit of nostalgia from the very beginning of RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN. Just as in the game's classic predecessor, you are in a dark cell within Castle Wolfenstein, armed only with a knife, and there's one Nazi guard around the corner. This time, however, you're using the glorious QUAKE 3 TEAM ARENA engine. Old and new come together in WOLFENSTEIN, and after sitting down for some playtime (rather than placing blind faith in a babbling developer), I found my jaded self becoming excited.

For all the ballyhoo about the next HALF-LIFE or NO ONE LIVES FOREVER, this one's the real Nazi-killin' thing—faithful to the original, but with plenty of new touches for a new generation. Gray Matter, the game's developer (and maker of the ultraviolent KINGPIN), has clearly done its gaming homework.

Iconography

After that first, familiar room, I immediately ran into the next room and swung my trusty knife around, inflicting multiple stab wounds upon the hapless Wehrmacht grunt. Then I swiftly ran over to the door, and just as I was about to press the Use button to open the door, I noticed a new icon of a flashing hand at the bottom of the screen. Gray Matter has added this little touch to take care of one of the big frustrations in first-person-shooters: knowing what's usable and what isn't. How many times have you walked up to a door and smacked the spacebar, only to be greeted with the sound of a locked door? Now you can just quickly glance down to see if you should even bother trying the door.

The icon alerts aren't confined to doors. As I opened the door, I wandered into a room where some evil Nazi genius was about to apply a round of electrical coercion to a stalwart ally of mine. The genius, back turned to me, said in that famous high-pitched Nazi tone something along the lines of, "Ah, did the other prisoner cooperate this time, Sergeant?" Quietly stepping up behind him as he fiddled with a chart, I saw an icon indicating a knife thrust. Tapping the attack key,

The grandiose scale of this imposing fortress is repeated in many of the later levels in the game.

One scripted sequence involves a squad of the SS Elite Guard parachuting down to rain Nazi death upon you.

I jammed the knife right into his neck, killing the Mengele wannabe instantly. Yes, the game will let you know that you're in the right position to deliver a knife straight to the jugular.

Then, after accidentally using the electrical torture device on my buddy (whoops), I got near a swastika flag and noticed a new icon: a hand breaking a box. This time, I got to see myself tear into the swastika flag with my knife. The icons also indicate whenever something is breakable.

In keeping with the tradition of the original game, there are secrets all around, ranging from stashes of lost Nazi gold to hidden weapon caches to those infamous turkey dinners. And rather than tirelessly slapping the Use key up along the walls in an effort to find these secrets, gamers can now look for visual anomalies (such as miscolored walls); if the icon shows up, you can dig the secret out.

Finally, the icons take care of another annoyance that has plagued FPS gamers: climbing ladders. Remember trying to figure out how to get down a ladder in just about any game? Or resorting to the age-old technique of jumping down, then grabbing the ladder before you smack into the floor? Now an icon will pop up whenever you can climb up or down something. Just hit another key, and you're instantly on the ladder. Also, because the icon shows up whenever you're near any climbable surface, you can now scale walls and vines as well. That means you won't find out-of-place ladders littering the levels.

A New World

Anyone who played KINGPIN knows that the Gray Matter team can create gritty wreckage better than anyone else. For this game, they traveled all over Europe to take pictures of castles and World War II–era buildings for textures and architectural reference. Every door you will open or kick is taken from some 10th-century German castle or museum. Also, while the first part of the game takes place entirely within CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN, the rest of the game showcases all-new environments. As you progress in the three episodes (each divided into multiple missions), you'll travel to wrecked towns, Nazi bases hidden in the wilderness, crypts, and even U-boat bases in Norway.

As in SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II (see page 72), terrain features from the Q3TA engine are put to good use. One of the missions I saw was a parachute drop into a forest, with your equipment dropped elsewhere. You have to sneak around the trees and the hills as you grab your loot and make your way to the secret Nazi bunker. The Norway mission looked beautiful, with the falling snow and rolling peaks distracting me from the ominous-looking U-boat docked nearby. The extreme grittiness of KINGPIN's gangland setting is taken much, much further in a mission taking place in an abandoned town—a level so rundown with wreckage and decay that I felt like I was waltzing through a re-creation of Stalingrad.

Beyond Goose-Stepping Grunts

While shooting Nazis never gets old, I was able to play a mission late in the second episode that revealed a surprising new enemy in the game. While investigating a crypt where a Nazi ritual has goes awry, I found myself contending with the familiar Nazi goons...and zombies. Yes, zombies.

Drew Markham, creative director at Gray Matter, comments, "We knew the story was going to focus more on

There's new camera-scripting technology for WOLF, so you can expect swoops and pans for cut-scenes, like this view of a Nazi mad scientist and the poor guy behind him.

Nazis will sacrifice themselves for the greater good when confronted with a grenade.

Himmler than on Hitler, but when we started the research, we saw just how much of a nut he was. He was convinced that he was the reincarnation of a ninth-century German prince, to which we said, 'Hey, let's assume that he's right!' With Himmler pouring research into genetics and the occult himself, that's where we got our enemy library. Every monster is derived from something Himmler and the SS were working on."

The realistic-to-fantastic enemy ratio is about 75 percent humans to 25 percent nonhumans (zombies, genetic monsters, and whatnot), so gamers need not worry about WOLFENSTEIN turning into some weird fantasy fest. "We're going for a paranormal feel; the real world laced with bits of weirdness," says Markham. And hey, Nazis and the occult made for a perfect combination in the *Indiana Jones* movies.

The AI from Q3TA was ripped out and built completely from scratch for WOLFENSTEIN. Nazi guards now have several stages of AI, ranging from "taking a smoke" to "is someone there?" to "ALARM!" They'll notice bodies and bloodstains, and can hear gunfire. I played a mission in which I had to disable an experimental rocket, and after I sniped one Nazi, his buddy soon realized what was happening and logically was keeping an eye out for where I was hiding. He was smart enough to figure out that I was out there, though he didn't know where I was until I fired again.

Other aspects of AI action that I got to see for myself: self-sacrifice, fear, and surprise. Not only can you simply open a door, you can also stealthily open a door, kick it open, or make a running charge. Running charges are so loud and jarring that after making one I saw the Nazi guards, startled, freeze for a moment before attempting to attack me. I tossed a grenade into a room, and a Nazi kicked it back toward me. Later, I shortfused a grenade (held it before throwing), and because it exploded almost instantly, one Nazi out of a group of four leapt in front and took one for the team. Finally, I burst into a room spewing jets of flame everywhere, only to see the two Nazi schlumps, armed only with pistols, take a look at my flaming self and run away.

Wolfenstein's Heroes

Not only has the AI been tweaked, but Gray Matter is taking several approaches to ensure that the narrative and gameplay remain fresh and intriguing. Rather than being assaulted with pointless and meandering cut-scenes, you'll glean plot information through story texts and incidental dialogue (a cue from NOLF, perhaps?). Both the text pieces and the dialogues run the gamut from story progression to in-game hint. You might read a memo about the SS Paranormal Division's next assignment or find instructions on launching a rocket, and you might hear two guards talking about their shift assignments or about a mishap at a crypt.

In addition, the AI and level structure allow for a more flexible approach to finishing the various mission objectives. In one level, I had the task of assassinating five Nazi officers in a Nazi-occupied town. I could simply run and gun it, or I could sneak around, listen to the guards, figure out their patrol pattern, and silently knife each of my targets. In other words, I could play the mission in straight shooter fashion, or as a commando-style raid that could have been lifted from THIEF.

Finally, the three bosses in the game will each present specific weaknesses and challenges that will force you to go beyond emptying your guns into them.

Gray Matter isn't concerning itself with multiplayer action. In an interesting decision, Gray Matter is focusing exclusively on the main game while a separate developer will focus on the multiplayer portion. (The multiplayer developer had not yet signed a contract at press time.)

WOLFENSTEIN has so much going for it right now that it's almost begging for a curse. All the elements in place so far look fantastic (even the zombies), and I'm hoping that Gray Matter gets the time to polish the game and make it worthy of the WOLFENSTEIN legacy. It may not be the most innovative shooter ever made, but its fusion of classic FPS gameplay and modern nuances should at least create something that's fun to play.

Next HALF-LIFE? Maybe. Greatest shooter ever? Hard to say. Will it be a fun ride? Damn straight.

Developer: **Gray Matter** Publisher: **Activision** Release Date: **Q4 2001** Website: **www.activision.com/games/wolfenstein/**

When using a sniper rifle, you can either take the shot immediately, while you still have "wobbly" aim, or you can wait a bit, calm down, and take a clean shot.

With the revamped AI, Nazis will act as a focused team rather than a disparate array of single-minded halfwits.

Thanks to the wonders of modern technology, this guy is more realistic both visually and mentally. And just about all the terrorists wear masks, to boot.

Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix

Raven keeps it real for its next grisly game **By Thierry Nguyen**

Given the first SOLDIER OF FORTUNE's strong sales in its various incarnations (original, Gold, "banned in Canada" edition), the developers could have taken the easy way out with the sequel: Retexture some of the levels, drop in even more halfwits, slather on more of that disturbingly amusing dismemberment, dump it in a box, and start raking in the cash. Fortunately, Raven is taking its time and making an honest-to-god, full-blown sequel rather than a glorified expansion pack. The developer is retooling the characters, the AI, the terrain, and just about everything else involving the QUAKE 3 TEAM ARENA engine to make a game that is more than just SOF with a "II" after it and even more flailing femurs.

Terminal Reality

Upon playing SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX, one thing is immediately apparent: There's more realism. Yes, the action is still primarily run-and-gun, shoot-to-kill, adrenaline-generating mayhem, but everything from the graphics and AI overhauls to the types of guns you'll be using produces a better sense of reality and toughness than the previous game had.

"This time, we're going for less an over-the-top Bruckheimer-style action fest and more a realistic, Tom Clancy–style story," says Kenn Hoekstra, project administrator at Raven and scripter for SOF II. "For one thing, you won't be fighting Iron Man with a microwave gun in the end like in the first game." Not only is the script a lot cleaner and less like a "dumb action movie," Hoekstra says, but the overall story is grounded more in reality. Those who remember their biology classes will know that a double helix is the configuration of DNA, and with the recent mapping of the human genome fresh in mind, gamers can draw conclusions about what the story will be about.

Ex-Special Forces soldier John Mullins, real-life consultant and in-game

"Everything from the graphics and AI to the guns produces a better sense of reality and toughness."

protagonist, returns for even more involvement with this game. In the original SOF, he lent his likeness and helped make the firefights seem more realistic. This time, he's contributed details ranging from weapon selection to personal experience. Many of the missions are drawn from his real-life adventures, including the opening one, in which you have to extract Dr. Ivanovich from Prague and bring him to the United States, which sets off the bioterrorism plot line. Other locales for mercenary mayhem include a massive ocean liner, a Hong Kong prison, Colombia, and Kamchatka.

Run Silent, Run Deep

Jon Zuk, project lead for SOF II, dropped me into a mission taking place in Colombia. I saw all these AI Marines sneaking about through the jungle, pausing to give each other hand signals. "Those are all real hand signals, but someone recently pointed out that they're Army Ranger hand signals, not Marine ones," commented Zuk. I spent some time watching the marines before I realized that I probably should have kept up with them. I ran around with a large rifle like a gibbering idiot until Zuk advised me to start looking for cover. Moments later, I heard radio chatter, and Colombian rebels started to open fire on me and my AI buddies.

That's when I saw that I could not only crouch, but also go fully prone. Stomach to the ground, I could either crawl around to reposition myself or start taking potshots from my covered position in the jungle. One of the changes from the first game, in keeping with the emphasis on realism, is the additional stealth ability. SOF had a stealth meter, but the game still became an extended run-and-gun affair, so the meter was but a novelty. The new ability to lie prone, along with the overall design of the missions, allows for more flexibility in gameplay. This time, it's a realistic option to scout the area out, then sneak around and take out the terrorists covertly. While you can conceivably still just be John Rambo and gun everyone down, the additional realism will also let you be a sneaky commando.

In the next mission I played, in Kamchatka, there were plenty of places to take cover, and I saw that if I was I patient, I could wait out the guards and simply knife them stealthily instead of attacking outright.

Rifle-Carrying Brainiacs

Kamchatka also demonstrated the completely overhauled AI. For all intents and purposes, the terrorists in SOF really were a pack of morons with guns. They've received a complete visual makeover and are smarter, yet have more limitations. On the one hand, they will now use cover, wait for backup, and be able to hear gunshots (no more shooting Earl dead and having his buddy Mortimer, who's right next to him, not notice). On the other hand, they will have to physically look for you, scanning the area with their eyes, instead of homing in on you instantly; they will have to reload during a firefight; and they will run out of ammo. Soldiers and terrorists alike

Thank the Q3TA engine for providing much better renderings of people, places, and even grass.

Alas, while these Marines look cool and work well together, there is only one mission in which you'll have them as backup. The rest of the game is purely solo.

behave like real people, neither godly gunsmiths nor horrendous halfwits.

All this stealth, realism, and smartness would be moot if the game looked like some half-baked QUAKE II mod. But thanks to the Q3TA engine, Raven's proprietary GHOUL system (used to render your foes) presents you with believable faces, skeletal animations, and yes, dismemberments. The most significant Q3TA enhancement, though, is the new random terrain system. Not only does the terrain make outdoor missions like those in Colombia a lot more believable, but it also allows for one of the more interesting decisions Raven has made.

In lieu of a multiplayer mode, there is now a Random Mission Generator. Using the random terrain engine, the game will spit out a randomly generated landscape, drop some prefabricated buildings onto it, and then plunk some enemies down into it. "We wanted something along the lines of a skirmish mode that you'd find in an RTS, and with the terrain, the enhanced bolt-ons, and the better AI, random missions are now possible," says Zuk. So even if you've already saved the world, you can fire up the game and get a measure of surprise and variety, rather than blithely memorizing the maps and running on autopilot. It will be interesting to see how the shooter community reacts to this design decision.

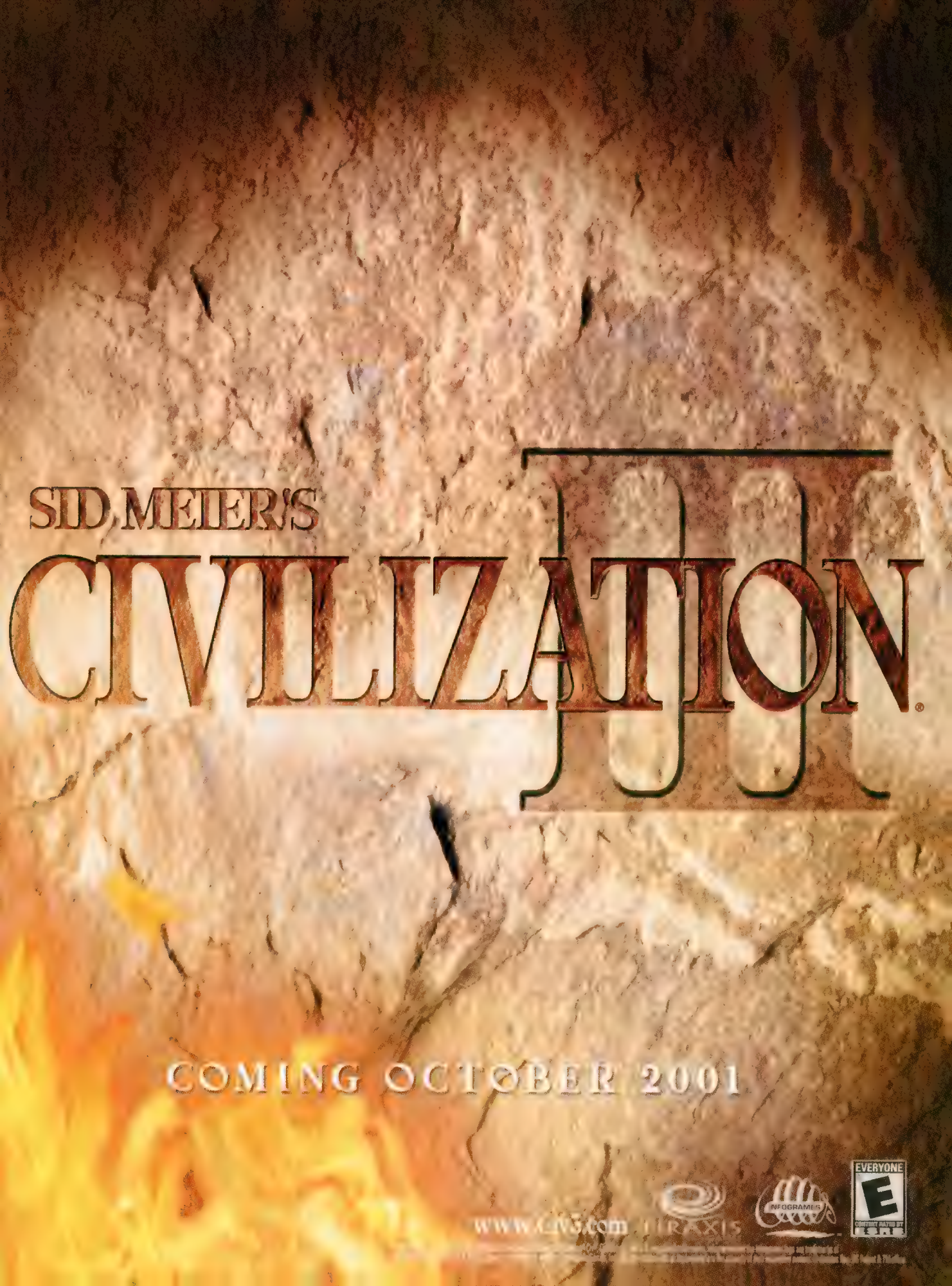
Shoot to Kill

It's an intriguing design balance that Raven is going for. It's not aiming to enter the tactical sim market, but it is aiming to give you more realism than a traditional run-and-gunner provides. Ultimately, Raven is giving gamers more options, and judging by what I've seen, it has fixed most of what was wrong with the previous game. Keep an eye out this fall for this opportunity to graphically dismember hyperrealistic terrorists.

Developer: **Raven Software**
Publisher: **Activision**
Release Date: **Q4 2001**
Website: **www.ravensoft.com**

Vehicles such as helicopters and jeeps will be used throughout the game. The team hopes to implement a fast-attack vehicle as well. The levels we saw also use the terrain engine to good effect.

All guns, like this USAS-12, are actual weapons handpicked by consultant John Mullins. Brand names won't be used due to licensing issues, but the military designations, likenesses, and statistics are all from the real world.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Mars needs gamers **By Tom Price**

This is you: Parker is well prepared for the hostile Martian environment with his enviro-suit and stolen guard's pistol.

We've been keeping a close eye on the development of THQ's intriguing sci-fi FPS RED FACTION for some time now. We don't often take such interest in a game that debuts on a video-game console before it comes to the PC, but this isn't just another shoddy port. Game developer Volition (which brought you the classic DESCENT and FREESPACE series) has been developing the PC and PS2 versions of RED FACTION concurrently, and the recently released PS2 version has been hailed by reviewers as the best single-player experience since HALF-LIFE. Of course, we're holding back on hyperbolic assessments like that until we see the finished product, but the exclusive beta build we've been playing definitely has us warming up our plaudits.

Our build has allowed us to play almost the entire single-player campaign, and while it probably won't top the sublime HALF-LIFE, it could be the most compelling story you'll experience in a FPS this year, and it should be one of those games crossing our lips come January when we're discussing year-end awards. It's a gritty, realistic, and dramatic gaming experience that should demand replaying again and again. We haven't seen the multiplayer mode yet, but based on what we've seen of the single-player game it's also riding high on our must-play list.

Gamers Are From Mars

If you don't know anything about RED FACTION, here's the premise: You're Parker, a lowly miner on Mars, employed by the Ultor corporation. Conditions in Ultor's mines are deplorable, and an uprising calling itself Red Faction has taken up arms against evil Ultor and its sadistic guards. The beginning of the game has you joining the rebellion out of necessity—the guards are out to put down the uprising by killing every miner in their path, and your main goal is to save your own skin and get off Mars.

You'll find yourself progressing through various environments, from the dark caves and shafts beneath the Martian surface to the administrative offices of Ultor, to orbiting space stations. As in HALF-LIFE, RED FACTION's levels aren't broken up into autonomous missions, but instead flow together like connecting areas. The level design and texture mapping isn't extravagant—few areas are going to make you say "wow"—but the gritty textures and the industrial-type layouts are highly effective at maintaining an aura of claustrophobia and danger. Combined with the similarly effective ambient sound effects and lighting, this makes RED FACTION a dark and moody game that should have gamers' hearts racing in anticipation of what lies around the next bend.

Weapons Check

Like any first-person shooter, a good deal of RED FACTION's appeal lies in its weaponry. And let me tell you, there are some sweet boomsticks lying around Mars. For starters, there are two different rocket launchers: a smaller antipersonnel launcher that you find surprisingly early in the game, and a big mother of a launcher that can take out large groups or attack vehicles in a blinding flash. There's also plenty of exploding stuff like satchel charges and grenades—which is good.

The seeds of revolution were planted long ago, but it's this scripted event that puts the uprising into full swing.

because one of the unique selling points of RED FACTION is its Geo-Mod technology, which essentially allows you to blow a hole in almost any unreinforced wall.

The Geo-Mod technology is really cool and absolutely necessary to pass through certain areas, but I was surprised at the restrictions placed on it. There were more areas where it didn't work than I was expecting, which at times was disappointing. I know it must be hard to design and balance the game so that players can't just bypass everything by digging tunnels around levels with their rocket launchers, but in certain areas the application of Geo-Mod seems a little inconsistent, as if the designers are forcing gamers to do things a certain way.

In addition to some pretty cool guns and other handheld toys, the developers at Volition have decided to work to their strength and include some vehicles in the game. Since you're mostly flying around enclosed environments, you can't help but be reminded of the DESCENT series. The vehicle that evokes that sensation most is the fighter, which you'll use to fly around some large rooms and caverns, blasting away at soldiers and other fighters with a Gatling gun and a guided missile launcher. In a similar vein, a miniature sub is included so that you can navigate caves that are fully submerged. The underwater explosion effect you see when you take out another sub with a torpedo is reminiscent of the cool cavitation effect in *The Abyss*. In essence, submarines implode rather than explode.

A Hi-res render of Parker in action.

What About Multiplayer?

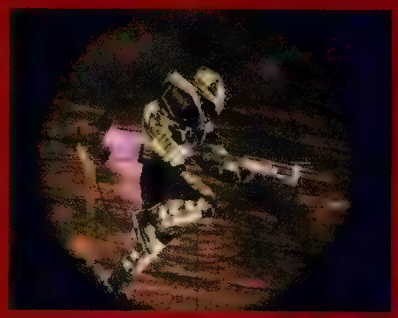
With almost any first-person shooter on the PC, a robust multiplayer mode is more than appreciated, it's expected. So you'll be glad to hear that RED FACTION will ship with a multiplayer mode that includes deathmatch and CTF (capture-the-flag) options at this point, and probably a few more upon release. Weapons will function just as they do in the single-player game and turrets will be available, but vehicles, unfortunately, had to be left out. It would have been cool to support your teammates on a flag run with a fighter or the APC, but no matter. Volition's inclusion of a level editor that allows you to make multiplayer maps as well as single-player campaigns should make up for it.

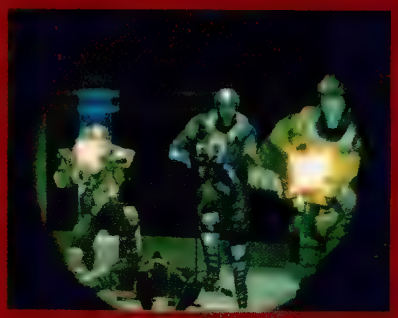
Resistance Is Futile

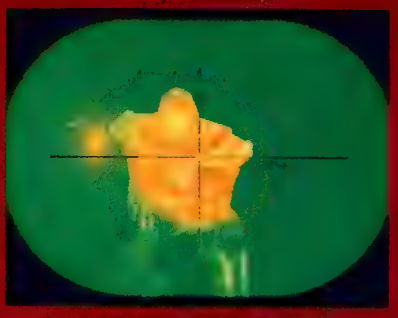
The enemy AI in this beta build of the game is surprisingly good, and it improves as you progress through the game and encounter tougher and better-equipped enemies. Bad guys take cover when battling it out with you, or crouch to make themselves smaller targets. If you start roughing up one of the low-level guards he'll run away and look for cover, all the while saying things like "I give up!" and "You win." Don't listen to him. Once they get a chance, the guards will turn back around and start fighting again. Later on, when the mercenaries hired by Ultor to squash the rebellion show up, you'll encounter some really tough customers. You'll also fight a few aliens along the way, but none of them are named Marvin, that's for sure. The variety and complexity of the models used in the game is impressive, and contributes to the believability of the setting.

Everything we've seen of RED FACTION so far, including the exclusive build we've played, points to a really promising game. By the time it's released, RED FACTION should provide one of the most satisfying experiences you've had with an FPS in quite some time.

Developer: **Volition** Publisher: **THQ**
Release Date: **Q4 2001**
Website: **www.redfaction.com**







A few of your weapons will allow you to zoom in on your targets. From the top: the Sniper Rifle, the Precision Rifle, and the Rail Driver.

Max Payne

The most exciting slow-motion game you'll ever play **By Robert Coffey**

With incredibly detailed textures, impressive lighting effects, and an engine that tracks and renders every projectile as a 3D object, MAX PAYNE is a technological tour de force.

How does a shooter deprived of the inherently immersive, more personal first-person perspective still deliver thrills? How does a game create a heart-pounding, adrenaline-charged gaming experience when its most distinctive feature is slow motion? MAX PAYNE's answer: by creating a series of gripping cinematic moments prohibited by the blistering pace and perspective of the standard first-person game. There is only one way to tell if this solution can work—play the game.

Which is what we did.

Graphic Violence, Graphic Novel

If you've ever seen a "rogue cop" action movie, then you know the basic story of MAX PAYNE: hard-boiled undercover agent framed by the very people he thought he was working for initiates an unholy bloodbath in the name of revenge. Where this shooter breaks away from the gaming pack is in telling its gritty story through painted comic book–style panels displayed between levels, instead of the traditional clumsy in-engine cut-scenes.

As hard-nosed and violent as the game is, 10 minutes into clearing a crumbling tenement building of gangs of gun-packing goons, I was struck by the relative tameness of the carnage. No gibs, no pain skins, no severed limbs or exploding heads, just some blood on the walls and floors and dead bodies. Lots of dead bodies. But the game felt more brutal than it appeared, and I think that can be directly attributed to MAX PAYNE's signature feature, a slow-motion bullet-time effect à la *The Matrix*.

The slo-mo is actually two features conveniently combined into one button press. Smack the keyboard while you're moving and you'll perform a "shoot dodge," leaping backward or sideways or diving straight ahead, guns blazing. The straight-up "bullet time" feature actually gives you a gaming edge, slowing down the action to about 20 percent of full speed and dropping your rate of fire by about 50 percent, but letting your targeting reticule move at 100 percent speed. Both functions add immeasurably to the game.

First off, there's just no getting around it: Launching yourself into a room packed with thugs— your machine pistols spitting death—is incredibly dramatic, and the brief but delicious slow motion of a shoot

"The brief but delicious slow motion of a shoot dodge lets you savor every violent moment of it."

dodge lets you savor every violent moment of it. Back in that tenement building I had Max dive down a flight of stairs, virtually flying across the stairwell as he mowed down the gangsters below him.

A Slow, Not Silent Killer

But it's the true bullet-time that really punches up what could otherwise be routine gun battles. When you consider that you only fight increasingly well-armed and armored human opponents, tedium could easily overwhelm gamers at about mid-game. But once you start playing the game, you quickly discover that bullet time is crucial. For starters, there was no point in the game where I was facing just one or two enemies: Whether I was in a firefight on a snowy rooftop, shooting it out in a parking garage, or blasting my way through an office building, I needed the bullet time to give me that temporary advantage. Since I only had a limited amount of slowly regenerating bullet time, I really had to manage my use of it. This gives the game a more tactical, strategic flavor than the average shooter.

Scripted events such as fleeing a burning, collapsing building will provide exhilarating twists to the constant gunfights.

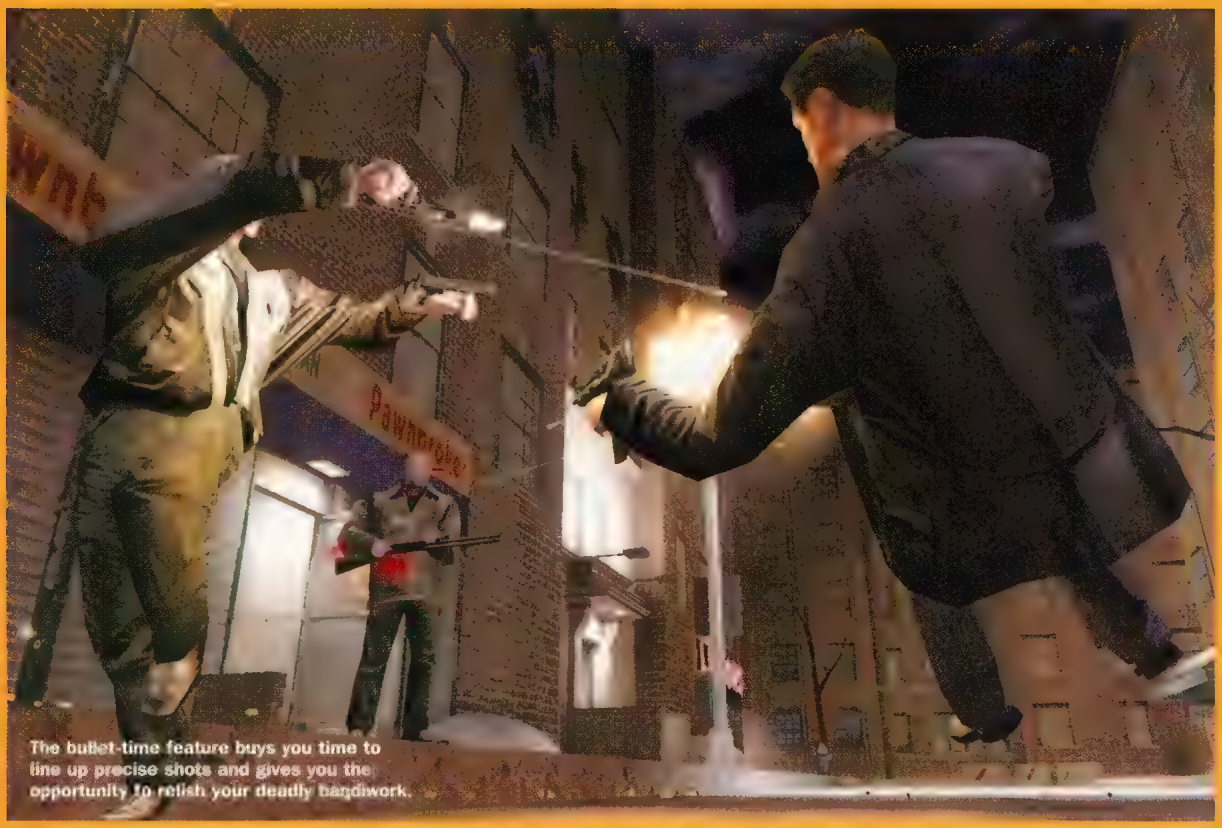
But the true payoff of the bullet time is its creation of the kind of tension and visual wonder that the best action movies generate. No other game I've played has created the nerve-wracking tension associated with the near-miss. MAX PAYNE does. While a full-speed, first-person shooter may give you a vague sense of escaping fire, MAX PAYNE lets you watch every bullet fired at you rip a trail through the air, often surprising you with a projectile whistling just past Max's ear. And nothing matches the impotent sense of doom you feel as you watch a spray of buckshot slowly cutting through the air toward Max's torso.

Perhaps the best experience I had while playing this late beta build of the game didn't involve gunfire at all. Out of bullets and pinned behind a column in the garage, I hit the bullet-time key in a mistaken bid to buy more time. Three enemies circled the pillar as I spun Max the opposite way and he ejected his clips and reloaded. The tension was excruciating—had I reloaded in time to face my foes, or was I slowly spinning Max to a violent death?

As great as all of this is, MAX PAYNE needs some work before it hits shelves late this summer. For one thing, the targeting reticule is a painfully small white pixel that makes picking up targets extremely difficult (especially later in the game when Kevlar-wearing enemies practically dictate that you go solely for head shots). We're crossing our fingers that Remedy Entertainment comes to its senses and includes some other options. Also, as big as the levels are, playing time could be a concern. When we asked how long it should take to finish the game, we were told 20 hours. That's not a lot for a game lacking the life-extending qualities of multiplayer. Hopefully, that figure is more a reflection of how long a tester who's been playing the game constantly for the last two years would play.

Those concerns aside, our exclusive playtesting of MAX PAYNE made it clear that this will be the most stylish shooter in years.

Developer: **Remedy Entertainment**
Publisher: **Gathering of Developers**
Release Date: **Summer, 2001**
Website: **www.godgames.com**



The bullet-time feature buys you time to line up precise shots and gives you the opportunity to relish your deadly handiwork.

If you stick with the captain, he'll tell you what to do—if he doesn't get killed.

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

QUAKE meets *Saving Private Ryan*. By Ken Brown

Imagine standing in a bobbing Higgins boat in the first wave of D-day at Omaha Beach. The door opens to a torrent of machine-gun fire, accompanied by the staccato "pank! pank!" of rounds pelting metal. How would you feel at the moment of truth, when you'd have to jump into the spray of bullets with soldiers falling and dying all around you? You'd probably piss your pants—that's what some guys did.

Fortunately, that didn't happen when I played MEDAL OF HONOR at EA's offices. The game is certainly nerve wracking, and it does a fine job of creating that D-day feel, but you shouldn't need a diaper to play it.

The game begins like the movie *Saving Private Ryan* does: In the gray light of dawn the seas are rough, and you're in a line of Higgins boats droning toward the beach. You can look around and move, like Gordon Freeman in the railcar in HALF-LIFE. But you can't go far because you're packed in with a squad of soldiers. They're obviously ducking to keep their heads down.

There are several more boats on both sides. Near the beach, the one on your left takes a direct hit: soldiers' broken bodies go twisting through the air. When the boat stops, the door pops open and the bullets come whizzing in. The constant sound of gunfire and yelling and explosions will definitely get your blood

pounding. It's different from most shooters not only because it looks like World War II, but also because of the unrelenting weapons fire. Some soldiers have compared combat to having a jackhammer next to your head, and now you'll understand why.

With god mode off, I made it to the far side of the beach, but I think the player stats were set rather high. Near the berm I laid down for cover and turned around. A mortar round landed in a squad of soldiers and blew them away. Another soldier took a round right behind me and fell at my feet.

I ran over, picked up some bangalore mines from a dead soldier, and blew up the barbed wire at the foot of the bunker. There was a Springfield 1903 sniper rifle lying nearby, perfect for taking out the machine-gunners on the bluff. I then raced through the bunker itself, using a Thompson submachine gun to take out about 20 soldiers defending it. The soldiers were easy to kill, but their AI wasn't finished yet, so it's hard to say how they'll do when the game ships.

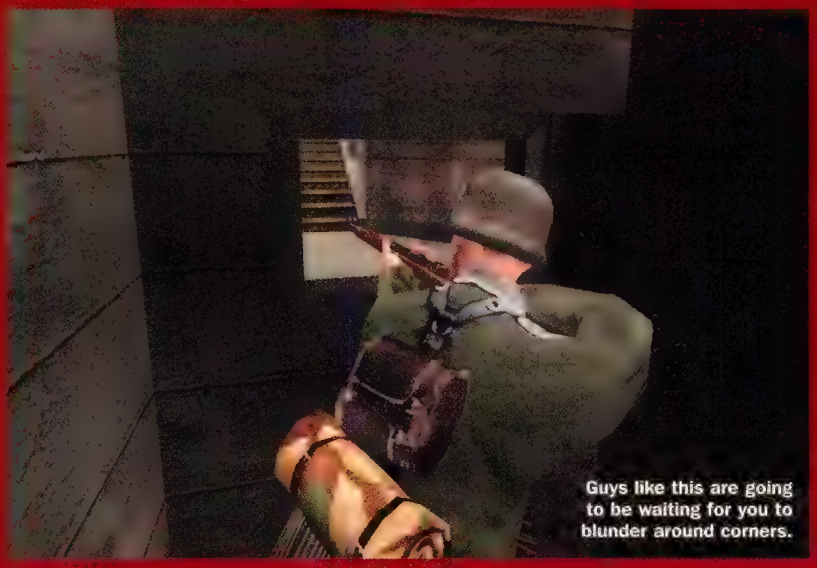
Players should have a great sense of accomplishment when they make it to the top of the bunker and shoot the German gunners in the next tower over. Free to move, soldiers pour over the beach, giving you an emotional reward rare in a PC game.

Of course, this is just one level in a game that takes you across Europe for the climactic crossing of the bridge at Remagen. You'll face a variety of challenges in the game, but the only other level I played was called Snipertown. Here, in a bombed-out French village, I died repeatedly, blundering into areas that I thought were safe. German sharpshooters were difficult to spot, but easy to take out. You'll face some surprises in this level, too, like an ambush and a Tiger tank that chases you down the street. Just when you think you're done for, the Tiger bursts into flames and four P-47 Thunderbolts roar overhead—another scene shamelessly ripped from *Ryan*. Still, it's an exhilarating sensation when the tank goes up in smoke.

Can the developers of ALLIED ASSAULT maintain this level of authenticity, suspense, and surprise? Tough to say, but we're betting the game will survive the landing and accomplish all its objectives when it ships later this year.

Developer: **2015** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Release Date: **November, 2001** Website: **www.mohaa.ea.com**

MOH will boast [illegible] vehicles, including [illegible] tank, Stuka dive bombers, and V2 rockets.



Guys like this are going to be waiting for you to blunder around corners.

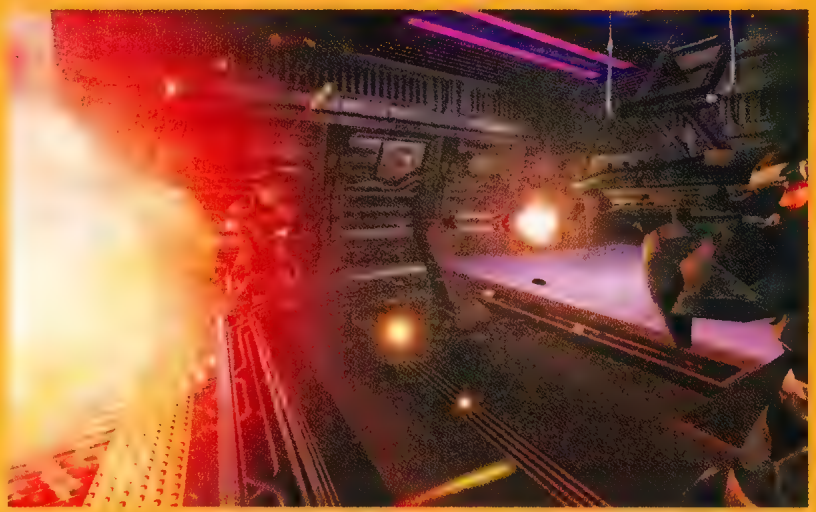
A spectacular direct hit on a nearby landing craft is one of many scripted events throughout the game.

Unreal II

Dare I say, Unrealer? By Thierry Nguyen

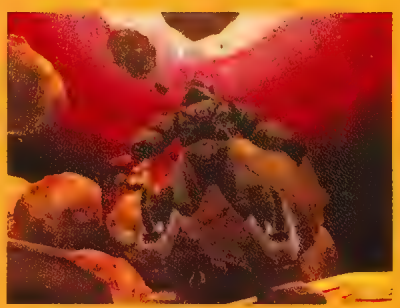
Everyone who's played UNREAL remembers the exact same moment: when the lights go out and your first Skaarj runs in, attempting to filet you into so many chunks of gamer meat. Despite the game's other qualities—its great visuals, interesting weapons, and requisite alternate fires—everyone points to that one moment. It's no surprise then that Legend plans to mass-reproduce that feeling with UNREAL II.

While UNREAL left a massive, dangling plot thread with the prisoner floating off into space, Mike Verdu, studio head for developer Legend Entertainment, points out that the prisoner's story is now complete—the UNREAL MISSION PACK: RETURN TO NA PALI expansion ends with him getting away for good. So UNREAL II starts with a clean slate. "I wanted to tell a fresh story and introduce the player to a new character, new enemies, and new worlds," Verdu says. "Same universe, but a new experience. I thought a radical shift in perspective would be cool. The player in UNREAL II takes the role of a peace officer—basically a cop—in sharp contrast to the role of escaped prisoner in the first game. Also, the driving motivation for the characters is different. The prisoner in the first game was simply trying to survive. The cop in UNREAL II is acting out of a sense of duty and obligation; he's trying to stop a war."



Sometimes you'll have teammates you can give orders to, UT style; other times you'll work alone.

You might wonder why he bothered explaining the story to me: With a background in adventure games—the Robert Jordan based WHEEL OF TIME was its last shooter—narrative is Legend's specialty. In fact, the developer has added something unseen in any of the big shooters: actual dialogue systems. Between missions (the plan calls for 13 overall missions/chapters), you'll be able to waltz around the halls of your ship, the *Atlantis*, and discuss plot details with your crew. Much as in an adventure



UNREAL II will push the UNREAL technology to the limit, as shown in this map on an asteroid belt.

Your first mate, Aida, is just one member of the *Atlantis* crew you can talk to between missions.

game, a dialogue menu will pop up to let you gab with your buddies.

"This is where much of the story telling takes place," says Verdu. "We're trying to build a game that lets people can get as much or as little of the story as they want. If players don't want to be bothered with a lot of background info, they can simply move from mission to mission—they'll get only enough story to make sense of the missions and what's happening in the game. If they want to truly live the story, they can pick up lots of detail from conversations with the crew and with characters in some of the missions themselves."

But don't go thinking this is action story-time, and that you'll be spending more time flapping your jaws than squeezing your trigger finger. The emphasis will be on varying, intense, cinematic action. "In one mission you might be blowing away swarms of creatures in a fast-paced, visceral, but relatively mindless search-and-destroy-sortie, and in the next, you'll be commanding a team of soldiers in an assault on a base," Verdu says in describing the types of gameplay. There will be more than 20 new critters to kill, and at least 15 new weapons to kill them with, in addition to the ASMD Shock Rifle and the Flak Cannon from UNREAL TOURNAMENT.

There's not much else we can say—or that Legend is willing to tell. But from what we've seen so far, the fusion of narrative and action looks to be intact, the engine looks beautiful, and this game may combine the best elements of Unreal and Unreal Tournament. CGW

Developer: **Legend Entertainment and Epic Games** Publisher: **Infogrames**
Release Date: **Q1 2002**
Website: **www.unreal2.com**

What's Up With?

The dirt on the shooters with the 2s, 3s, and even 4s in their title **By Thierry Nguyen**

They sold millions. They defined the genre. They have sequels in the works that we will probably play...eventually. Here's the latest on all of the big shooter franchises.

DOOM 3

id Software wowed the community earlier this year by showing off elements of DOOM 3's engine at MacWorld. DOOM 3 will utilize an entirely new engine that's possible only through the might of the GeForce3 (according to Carmack), and, well, that's about it. For now. More details will be provided at QuakeCon this August, and you can depend on *CGW* to be there to get the scoop. For now, consider this a 2002 or 2003 title at best.

Duke Nukem Forever

Started way back in December of '97, when the SHADOW WARRIOR team got its hands on the QUAKE II engine, DUKE is in the home-stretch now. Really. Switching in mid-development to the UNREAL engine slowed the team down, and the media blackout didn't help in terms of publicity. While it hasn't been demoed at E3 in a while, the video shown at this year's E3 restored some faith among gamers. No official word on when, but don't be surprised if it comes out around Christmas.

Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms

Demonstrating a scenario involving paratroopers and tanks, it wowed audiences at E3...in 1999. It's been under a heavy cloak of secrecy since then. Its failure to appear at either the 2000 or the 2001 E3 had people doubting that this title even exists any more. All Valve will say now is that it's utilizing an all-new engine that will be used for COUNTER-STRIKE 2 as well, and that we should expect it sometime next summer.

Half-Life 2

File this under purely speculation and rumor. It's been said that since the release of HALF-LIFE, a select team of five or so designers at Valve has been locked in a room, working just on conceptualizing HALF-LIFE 2. In addition, Professor Ken Perlin at New York University has mentioned working closely with Valve on a facial animation system. CGW

Multi-Player Online Game and Comic Books

Redmoon

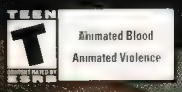
Immerse Yourself...

Read the e-book comics in the 18-volume series on which Redmoon is based, and download the free game software or order a CD, by visiting www.redmoon-online.com

Join the thousands of players already immersed in the world of Redmoon!

World Netgames

www.redmoon-online.com



Take the Fan-Boy Test

Are you a fan-boy? Do you pledge undying devotion to one particular game or series (QUAKE, UNREAL, BARBIE NAIL DESIGNER, and so forth)? Do you stay up all night on IRC debating the accuracy of laser-firing rates for the Y-Wing? Do even other gamers think you're a loser? Well then, you may be a fan-boy. Don't panic; though there is no known cure for fan-boyitis, you can fight the disease and return your life to balance. First, take our little quiz to see if you, too, are afflicted with the nation's fastest-growing (and most annoying) epidemic.

Answer Yes or No:

1. Do you have any game logos tattooed on your body?
2. Have you ever declared that a game sux/rox based solely on which popular game engine it runs on?
3. When you go to LAN parties, do you wear a uniform?
4. Does your online gaming handle consist of more than 50 percent symbols and punctuation marks?
5. Do you use the word "newbie" in your everyday speech (for instance,"That new guy at work is such a, um, newbie")?

Multiple Choice:

6. How often do you write a hateful letter to a gaming magazine because it panned your favorite game?
   - ■ Once a year
   - ■ Once a month
   - ■ Once a week
   - ■ There are restraining orders against me in three states.
7. When someone flames you in an online fan forum, how long does it take you to respond?
   - ■ A day
   - ■ An hour
   - ■ A minute
   - ■ Five seconds before the flame appears.

Essay Question:

In 25 words or less, tell me why your favorite game roolz and everything else suxors. Please mail your essay to: Mr. No One Cares, 1 They're Just Games Ave., Lighten Up, CA 94105

—Tom Price

SEPTEMBER REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
Emperor: Battle for Dune	★★½☆☆
Microsoft Train Simulator	★★★★☆
Gangsters 2	★½☆☆☆
Z: Steel Soldiers	★★☆☆☆
Echelon	★★★½☆
Disney's Atlantis: The Lost Empire—Trial By Fire	★☆☆☆☆
Leadfoot	★★★½☆
Off-Road Redneck Racing	★★★½☆
Panzer Campaigns: Tobruk '41	★★★☆☆
Starships Unlimited	★★★★☆
Shattered Galaxy	★★☆☆☆
Merchant Prince II	★½☆☆☆

HOW DO WE RATE? We review only finished games — no betas, no patches.

OUTSTANDING The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

VERY GOOD Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

AVERAGE Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

WEAK Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

ABYSMAL The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

One step forward, two steps back

The EMPEROR Has No Clue

First the good news: Compared with DUNE 2000, Westwood's last journey to the desert world of Arrakis, EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE is a blinkin' masterpiece. But given that DUNE 2000 was an ultracheap retread of COMMAND & CONQUER, that's faint praise indeed.

And here's the bad news: While EMPEROR does finally bring the COMMAND & CONQUER franchise into the brave new world of full 3D—only a couple of years after TOTAL ANNIHILATION, WARZONE 2100, HOMEWORLD, and GROUND CONTROL pioneered the territory—in every other respect it's a throwback, rife with baffling design decisions, clunky AI, and uninspired units.

EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE

reviewed by Jason Kapalka

The shielded Ordos laser buggies here make short work of this construction yard.

New and Improved?

As Westwood rarely tires of reminding us, it did originate the real-time strategy genre with DUNE 2 way, way back in 1845 (or thereabouts). Perhaps corporate nostalgia accounts for the fact that EMPEROR's gameplay has scarcely changed from its steam-powered predecessor.

The first thing you notice about EMPEROR isn't the admittedly impressive new 3D graphics; it's the Westwood sidebar you've seen a thousand times before, featuring the same infantry, tanks, and buildings (though, as the press release proudly notes, "It's improved! It's transparent!"). The sense of familiarity only grows stronger as you begin recognizing your old friends from C&C and RED ALERT: engineers, Nod bikes, flamethrowers, Chrono legionnaires, ion cannons, and so on, with the serial numbers filed off and a vaguely Dune-like paint job applied. Only the tank-topped Tanya fails to make a return appearance.

Admittedly, the old standbys are presented here in 3D-accelerated glory for the first time, and they do look nice and shiny. Explosions, shields, and the omnipresent (and omni-annoying) sandworm attacks are particularly impressive from a graphical standpoint. You can rotate your view as you wish (though there's really no reason to, given the flat terrain that's inherent to Dune), and, more usefully, zoom in and out with the mouse wheel.

On the down side, some of the units are difficult to distinguish in their new 3D guise, particularly infantry. Since EMPEROR's unit mix tends to favor designs that directly counter other units (flamethrowers versus infantry, rockets versus tanks, and so on), it can be a real problem when you inadvertently send a squad of antipersonnel gas troopers into a wall of advancing armor.

David Lynch Redux

Given that the copyrights on the loading screen loudly protect Dino De Laurentiis' 1984 film rather than Frank Herbert's original *Dune* books, it comes as no surprise that the inevitable cut-scenes crib from the movie, right down to B-list actors imitating Sting's spiky orange New Wave 'do. That said, the cinematics are quite well done, with fewer helpings of the cheese that was generously slathered all over TIBERIAN SUN and RED ALERT 2.

But the big departure in the single player mode is the strategic map. Instead of the usual linear progression of scenarios, you're faced with a *Risk*-style map of the entire planet, divided into territories controlled by the three competing Houses: Atreides, Harkonnen, and Ordos. Each "turn," you choose one enemy territory to attack. The number of adjacent provinces you and your foe control (supposedly) affect the balance of the battle: Each territory gives you one additional set of reinforcements that will arrive during the course of the fight.

While the map is initially refreshing, it soon becomes clear that it's more a cosmetic overlay than a true game layer as in, say, SHOGUN, which let you play a pretty satisfying game without ever descending into the tactical combat. Sure, the reinforcements and regional objectives make some difference, but practically every battle proceeds in time-honored RTS style, starting with your lone construction yard

CGW RATED

PROS

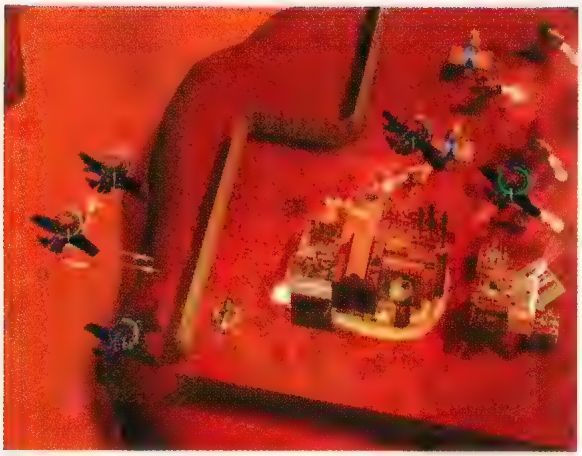
Nice graphics; fun cinematics; some interesting units; interactive campaign map is fun at first.

CONS

Outdated, clumsy interface; iffy AI and pathfinding; crummy multiplayer; an overwhelming sense of déjà vu.

Requirements: Pentium-II 400, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space, 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 600, 128MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer:** Internet (via Westwood Online), LAN (2-8 players).

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: Westwood Studios • $50 • www.westwood.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood, violence.



Harkonnen aircraft rain missiles down upon a hapless tiberium—or rather, mélange—refinery.

throwing up barracks and tiberium—er, mélange—refineries until you can mass-produce your army via the usual barracks and factories.

Burying Their Heads Deep in the Arrakis Sand

Veterans of RED ALERT 2—or any traditional RTS from STARCRAFT onward—will be confused and upset by the lack of many now-standard control features. The horrific, unusable, and altogether abominable waypoint system in TIBERIAN SUN has somehow reappeared in EMPEROR after having been replaced by the much more sensible shift-click command in RED ALERT 2. What the heck?

Also missing: any useful formations and any way to give units an "attack en route" order, meaning that most of your attacks degenerate into a horde of badly organized dudes shimmying pell-mell across the desert, refusing to fire back when nearby enemies start taking potshots. Coupled with some odd sound cues (for example, you're warned when a harvester is attacked, even by a lone infantryman, but not when one is destroyed), these faults make it all too easy for your entire army and economy to be laid waste while you fiddle with the "deploy" command on your Mortar Infantry.

The list of aggravating control issues continues: AI and pathfinding are iffy, with grouped units frequently blocking each other or taking extremely circuitous routes to their destinations. The Harkonnen Buzzsaws, rather clearly designed to overrun infantry, don't, unless you force-move them individually. Friendly fire is a real problem, with area-of-effect weapons like the Sonic Tank likely to destroy more of your army than of your foe's. The Carryalls, which airlift units across the map, completely fail to function when grouped, so if you are thinking of airlifting a tank squadron into the back of an enemy's base, you'll be doing it one...tank...at...a...time. It's difficult even to get your units to stand still properly: The erratic "guard" function has a tendency to send your troops wandering off on wild goose chases, while deactivating it results in sitting ducks.

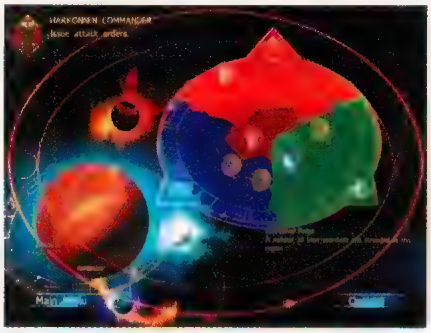
None of these complaints make the game unplayable, and at its best, EMPEROR does provide some good old-school RTS fun. Players can choose up to two "subhouses"—similar to the "specialty" units awarded to each country in RED ALERT 2—to supplement the units of their own side. While the standard House units are your bread-and-butter tanks and troops, the subhouses have some flamboyantly odd devices, such as the Fremen, with their worm-summoning thumpers; the teleporting Guild Spacers; and my favorites, the grotesque Tleilaxu, whose Contaminators and Leeches transform enemies into duplicates of themselves.

Alas, this is mostly useful in multiplayer, since your access to the subhouses is strictly limited during the campaign. And multiplayer has its own issues: Skirmishes against the computer are acceptable, but Westwood has actually regressed as far as its online matchmaking system goes, with the Westwood Online EMPEROR lobbies plagued by a clumsy interface, misreported pings, and general crash-your-computer buggage.

We Are Devo

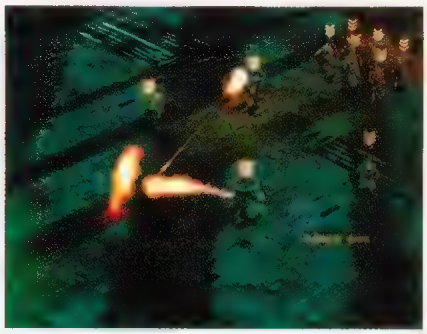
In the end, it's hard to recommend EMPEROR with much enthusiasm. While RED ALERT 2, against all expectations, made the classic real-time strategy game seem new again, EMPEROR, with all its fancy new gloss, just seems old hat.

Westwood, always a glacial innovator, has long favored the "evolutionary, not revolutionary" approach to game design. Alas, EMPEROR has kicked the process into reverse, providing a rare case study of devolution in action. Hopefully, when a revamped version of the engine finds its way into the inevitable COMMAND & CONQUER 3D, it'll go back to learning from its mistakes, rather than repeating them. CGW



The *Risk*-style strategic campaign map lets you choose which enemy territory to attack. It's a good idea but it doesn't quite work.

Sure it's all 3D, but the interface and play style are classic C&C. If you pay for a new game, shouldn't you actually get one?



This classic C&C non-production mission has Harkonnen flamethrower troops preparing to sabotage a hangar.

TRAIN SIMULATOR is a strangely relaxing, hypnotic experience

Get Onboard

TRAIN SIMULATOR
reviewed by Loyd Case

I'd been pumping on real-time strategy games and a couple of shooters when the package arrived on my doorstep. My initial reaction was "ugh."

Being the elitist snob I can be at times, it took a few hours of riding the rails to discover that I was wrong—and wrong for all the wrong reasons, to boot. While it may have been entertaining to have a railway cop mode where you hunt down hobos, that would have made TRAIN SIMULATOR a far lesser experience. You see, this game relaxing, but the seemingly leisurely pace keeps you hooked nonetheless.

There are three starter tutorials—one for each engine type (steam, electric, and diesel). You can also pick any of six routes (two each in the U.S., Japan, and Europe) including two famous historic routes—England via the Flying Scotsman and Austria on the Orient Express. You can pick "activities" for each route, which range from more in-depth tutorials of the route type (freight or passenger) to more complex activities. You can try to get your passengers to their destinations on time, navigate earthquake-damaged tracks, assemble an ideal freight train, or just wander the rails in a sort of sandbox mode. Controls are detailed and realistic (right down to feeding coal to the boiler in steam trains) or a more simplified set if you just want to check out the scenery. There're operating aids, such as small windows that pop up to show you the speed limit, switch activity, and distance to the next station.

By the way, that scenery is among the most detailed of any currently shipping game engine. Whether it's zipping through the outskirts of Tokyo or rolling through the Austrian countryside, dynamic scenery keeps you company. You'll see vehicles waiting patiently at crossings; weather can close in; and there are even deer that run onto the rails (no graphic depiction of roadkill, however). You can even derail the train, with the cars caroming off each other in a disturbing dance of real-world physics.

Once you master the tutorials and start the activity, time takes on new meaning. As you work the schedule, gather cars, and make your stops, all at a seemingly sedate pace, time in the real world accelerates—or at least, it seems that way. I came up for air after a few seemingly simple activities, only to find that several hours had passed. It's not just that time passes differently—I felt different than after usual game sessions. Normally after a game, I'm wired and a jumble of images and thoughts flashes through my head. After a session with TRAIN SIMULATOR, I'm relaxed. I can sleep well. After a bit, though, I want to go back, try to do better, and just sit there in the engine moving controls and responding to the situation. I have the strangest desire to go out and buy an engineer's hat. It's the weirdest gaming experience I've ever had.

The Orient Express, chugging through the Austrian countryside.

TRAIN SIMULATOR also ships with a set of tools that allow players to create new routes, trains, and adventures (though you do need modeling tools if you want to create entirely new models). Fan sites have sprung up with new routes and trains for downloading, including **www.train-sim.com** and **www.trainsim.org.uk**. In an odd twist, a PR rep for Union Pacific Railroad suggested they might take legal action against any fans who create trains with Union Pacific logos. UP had also refused to work with Microsoft during the making of TRAIN SIMULATOR, fearing that it would generate a rash of engine thefts by wannabe engineers. I suppose that's an endorsement, of sorts.

In the end, TRAIN SIMULATOR is a highly detailed simulation of operating trains, with elements that will appeal both to sim buffs and strategy gamers. So pull that dusty old engineer's hat out of the attic, ring the bell, and shovel that coal: You've got a schedule to meet. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Good attention to detail; track building tools included.

CONS
Important documentation is only in electronic format; fairly steep hardware requirements.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 32MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space, 4MB 3D graphics card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 500, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D graphics card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** None

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Kuju • $50 • www.microsoft.com/games/trainsim/ • ESRB Rating: Everyone

Hothouse's sequel plays it straight—and narrow

This Is Not Your Godfather's GANGSTERS

The first GANGSTERS was an inelegant sprawl of a strategy game. This sequel has fixed that—and that's part of the problem. Sure, it's easy to navigate, it's never overwhelming, and it's always clearly focused on one or two goals at a time. But it's also limited, linear, lifeless, and arguably not much of a strategy game at all.

The developers at Hothouse Creations obviously listened to criticisms of GANGSTERS. They've graced GANGSTERS 2 with a manageable realtime that never feels like it's running away from you. A simple click on the interface will center your view on the selected gangster, who can easily be directed using the context-sensitive cursor. To make play even more manageable, you have fewer gangsters and buildings than in the first game. In any given scenario, you're limited to controlling eight gangsters. The bulk of your power consists of computer controlled "muscle"—characters hired to guard your territory against enemy gangsters. Buildings are similarly automated. Capture a location and it automatically contributes to your income. It takes a few clicks to hire a specialist to run an illegal site such as a still, brothel, or loan-sharking operation, and then it's just an entry in your income ledger. It seems that Hothouse's idea of streamlining player interaction is to cut out most of it.

GANGSTERS 2
reviewed by Tom Chick

Your role in GANGSTERS 2 is basically twofold. First, you defend your territory by hiring guards. You are more the director of human resources than a godfather. "Let's see, we need three people at the department store and three people at the tenement buildings, but there are only four people available, so until we get some additional manpower, we'll use only one guy at the tenement."

Your second role is clicking on gangsters to give them attack targets. You'll spend a lot of time watching your men mow down enemy gangsters. And cops. Lots of cops. This game has a higher cop-killing factor than an Ice-T album, but with even less consequence. You eventually go up against FBI agents and even the military, but the pattern is the same: Kill a few, run into a building to hide until they go away, then come back out and kill some more. It's more like house-by-house fighting in the streets of Stalingrad than a gangland shootout. Eventually, you will overrun the enemy gang's headquarters and then—bang!—scenario's over. Do this through 20 very canned scenarios and you're done. No free-form scenarios, no sandbox mode, and no meaningful multiplayer options.

Later scenarios will have you going up against the military, a more difficult opponent than the local cops.

GANGSTERS 2 does feature illicit activities like bribery, kidnapping, and bank robbery, but only when they're scripted. Because the game is so linear and the goals are set in concrete with no room to play, there's no sense of running amok in the city. Lawlessness takes a backseat to simply capturing territory; this game is more about real estate than crime.

There's a narrator with a laughable Midland accent and stylish black-and-white title cards appear before each scenario, but Hothouse's engine is the only real atmosphere in the game. It provides a great isometric view of a Prohibition-era city with Chicago-style architecture, but that's about all it does. Every city looks the same, with minimal variation among the tiles. A movie house looks like a pawn shop which looks like a bank. Even worse, there's almost no attempt to give any of the gangsters personality. Going up against Cain "Stoneface" Langham feels just like going up against Jasper "Choker" Bigg, Felix "Tornado" Schank, or Ward "Bullseye" Coley. Some of your own gangsters have special abilities, but they tend to come into play only when specifically scripted in the scenario. Even the illegal activities feel the same: Counterfeiting money is no different from running a speakeasy or brewing beer.

The publisher calls GANGSTERS 2 "narrative-driven real-time strategy." This is apparently a code phrase for "linear, hands-off, pausable action with limited income and personnel management." Consider it an offer you can—and should—refuse. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Better AI and interface than its predecessor; stylish graphics.

CONS
All the charm of the first game is choked out of this one by the canned linear scenarios.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** None **3D Support:** None
Multiplayer: LAN, Internet (2-8 players), modem, serial connection (2 players).

Publisher: Eidos Interactive • Developer: Hothouse Creations • $40 • www.eidos.com • ESRB Rating: Teen (13+); animated blood and violence.

The thrill of victory, the agony of repeat

Mixed Emotions

If you were to look up the word "dichotomy" in the dictionary, I think a picture of ECHELON would be there. It'd read something like this: Di·chot·o·my - 1. Division into usually contradictory parts. 2. Botany. Branching characterized by successive forking into two approximately equal divisions. 3. Computer Games. ECHELON.

You see, I really like ECHELON—but I also really hate it.

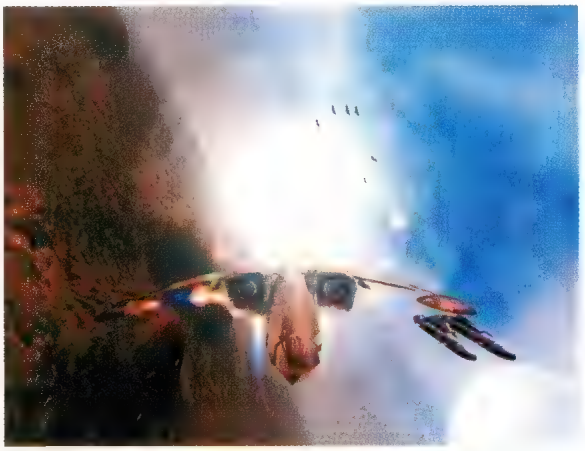
Although my opinion could be used as the definition of "ambivalence" as well, there's no mistaking the duality of ECHELON: It can put a stupid grin on your face one moment and royally piss you off the next. Even describing ECHELON is an exercise in double-talk. It can't quite be defined as a space sim, but it's not a traditional flight sim either. It manages to combine equal amounts of realism with good old-fashioned arcade shoot'em up sensibility. Think of ECHELON as part TERMINAL VELOCITY, part CRIMSON SKIES, and part WING COMMANDER.

ECHELON
reviewed by Gordon Berg

The setting is standard science fiction fare. While many other games have done a much better job of incorporating their stories into the gameplay itself, ECHELON merely uses its plot as backdrop. You play the role of a Federation pilot, doing your part to help put an end to the Velian invasion. Instead of flying in space, you slug it out planet-side on the Velian homeworld using various atmospheric-laden hoverjets. The fourteen flyable VTOL aircraft behave more like helicopters than jet fighters, but the flight model is definitely forgiving. As long as your aircraft remains intact and you watch your inertia (to avoid hitting the ground or ever-present mountainside), the flying is pretty easy. It does become a challenge, though, when you lose some of your control surfaces in-flight. Your controlling hardware will also dictate how precisely you can fly—invest in a joystick.

Despite the inclusion of an "e-Mouse mode," it's not as elegant a solution as what you find in Novalogic's TACHYON.

ECHELON'S visuals are fantastic. Supporting whiz-bang phrases and acronyms like "T&L" and "bump-mapping," ECHELON is one of those games that justifies buying a GeForce 3 card. On the other hand, the sound effects seem decidedly average. Maybe it's because the graphics are so good that the sound suffers by comparison.



With lens-flare, T&L, and whatnot, ECHELON is a great game to show off your newest, more-than-three-hundred-dollar video card.

The included campaign sports approximately 50 missions and offers several branching points. Most missions require the completion of the primary objective before you can move on, but there are some branches that allow for continuation based on failure. The gameplay itself within ECHELON'S campaign is where it best reveals its Jekyll-and-Hyde nature. The good part is that the combat is intense, and the AI often gives a great fight, especially when a few fighters have latched onto your six. Where it gets ugly is having to fly these missions over, and over, again. I'm not sure which is worse—having to fly the same mission twenty times before you finally solve its puzzle-like nature, or the fact that some missions are so damn hard that your skill as a pilot doesn't seem to matter. So while it's great that there's a high fear factor in ECHELON, the joy to be gained from a tense, nearly-complete, twenty-minute mission will quickly turn to anger if you are unfortunate enough to die.

Those who prefer to play with others are also likely to be irked. The lack of a server search menu means you need to know IP addresses ahead of time. Furthermore, in-game chatting requires a workaround. Granted, cooperative play is a welcome option instead of the usual deathmatch-only variant, but it's broken. You can't go through the single-player campaign directly; you can only go through parts of it if you'd played ahead of time and managed to save the missions with wingmen.

Engaging and gripping while it tests your aim, ECHELON is likely to test your patience as well. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Beautiful to look at; fun to play.

CONS
High difficulty and poorly implemented multiplayer means you'll play through parts of the lame story over and over again.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space, 16MB 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 500 or better, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet (1-16 players).

Publisher: Bethesda Softworks • Developer: MADia • $40 • echelon.bethesda.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone; animated violence.

The sequel to Z should have been named ZZZZZZ...

Better Dead Than Zed

STEEL SOLDIERS, like Z before it, is a very fast-paced strategy game, light on resource gathering, heavy on action. It's a competent enough game, and some will find it a fun change of pace, but it lacks the depth and design of better games in the genre.

Instead of harvesting resources, in STEEL SOLDIERS you gain money by capturing territories. Each map is sectioned off into squares, and you capture them by tagging the one flag in each territory. Each territory generates a trickle of credits each minute, and whoever captures the territory's flag gains that money. In contrast to other real-time strategy (RTS) games—where you can hole up in your base and huddle around a mine—here, you need to constantly be on the move, patrolling territories to either keep them in hand or steal them from the enemy. This creates a more action-oriented dynamic than in other strategy games.

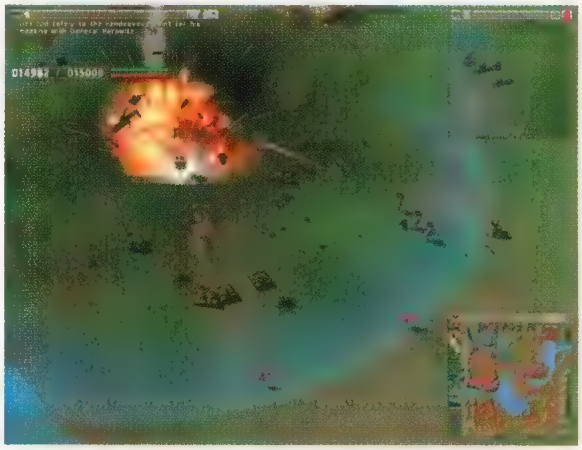
Z: STEEL SOLDIERS
reviewed by Elliott Chin

However, everything else is standard RTS gameplay. You have peon units building structures, which in turn, churn out more units. Despite a nice selection of these units (infantry, vehicles, helicopters, planes, and boats), combat generally comes down to whoever has the most units or the biggest guns. There is a clear increase in strength as you climb up the technology tree; low-level units are garbage as soon as you jump up to higher-end ones. Better-designed and balanced titles find ways to have their low-end units remain strategically useful later in the game (zerglings in STARCRAFT, or infantry in the C&C games, for example).

AWOL AI

Expect the STEEL SOLDIERS AI to exasperate you at times. Again and again, I would click on an enemy target and my troops would run a circle around the target, apparently to find a good location before shooting. A few times, my units got killed while setting up, even though they were already in range to fire immediately. When you click on a location to tell your troops to move, the game displays a white line that shows the path your troops will take.

Unfortunately, troops don't always follow that path, and you're misled into thinking your troops are moving through safe areas when in fact they aren't.



Sure it's a nice enough explosion, but for this you'll need a machine exponentially better than the unrealistic system the game box says STEEL SOLDIERS requires.

Even more frustrating is the fact that units won't assist each other. Many times, when one unit was fired upon, his buddies—standing right next to him—wouldn't even lift a finger.

The interface does nothing to help, especially because the various windows (like the minimap and message screen) are layered transparently on top of the game screen. Sometimes I would click on the minimap to jump to a different location, but if the minimap was layered on top of a building, the game would think I was selecting the building rather than the minimap. There doesn't seem to be a way to select troops by type, a problem when you have various types of units huddled together. Also, there are no hotkeys for creating units and buildings. The most egregious omission, however, is the lack of a game speed toggle.

The minimum system requirements are a joke; the game is flatly unplayable on a Pentium II system. You need at least a P-III 850, and even then the game crawls when dozens of units are on screen. You'll also want that hardware to avoid the eyesore graphics you get with a low-end machine—beefier systems can enjoy a much better looking game with some nice special effects. What never improves are the cheesy cartoon cut-scenes. Just skip them. Also, the game's sound is awful, mostly due to the exaggerated Southern drawl voiceovers.

STEEL SOLDIERS certainly plays at a faster pace than other strategy games. This might be enough for gamers who like constant back-and-forth action. But most every other aspect of the game makes STEEL SOLDIERS a must-pass. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Action-oriented gameplay; looks good on high-end systems.

CONS
Boring campaign; poor AI; no game-speed toggle; awful sound; no tutorial; high system requirements.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 850, 64MB GeForce2, 128MB RAM. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet (2-8 players), modem (2 players).

Publisher: Eon Digital Publishing • Developer: Bitmap Brothers • $40 • www.zsteelsoldiers.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

Drowning in the shallow end of the game pool

Waterlogged

Despite being based on one of the most adventurous and daring of Disney's recent animated films, ATLANTIS: TRIAL BY FIRE drowns in a shallow pool of drippy controls and murky story telling. Okay, I've used up all my "witty" water references—on with the review.

While this game is targeting a younger crowd, Disney may have shot a little too young—only a newborn wouldn't care how bland and uninspired this game is. Thankfully, it's abbreviated as well.

Bad controls—and I mean painfully bad controls—will probably send parents off to the doctor wondering why little Timmy suddenly has no hand-eye coordination. No worries, mom: Timmy just fell off that bridge/was trapped underwater/is unable to jump onto a simple block because Disney Interactive churned out a piece-of-trash game. Don't expect Timmy to understand the clunky, underendowed interface, either: You can't see what weapons or tools you are carrying, and you don't always know who is talking to you. Even worse, when you acquire new weapons, sometimes an explanation is missing. The most powerful gun in the game was never explained to me—assuming, of course, that that's what it was. How am I to know for sure?

ATLANTIS: TRIAL BY FIRE

reviewed by Jason Babler

In a game that's only two or three hours long at best, a few minutes of not knowing what's going on around you is a sizable piece of time, especially for a child. Timmy's not narcoleptic, he's just bored to death. Things happen around you in inadequate cut-scenes, then end abruptly and suddenly you're launched into the next level with no fluidity. The worst of these narrative lapses comes when a girl from Atlantis suddenly joins your team with no explanation. And no matter how desperately you want to, you can't hurl your radio into a deep lake—instead, you're forced to endure your team constantly piping up and saying something silly throughout the game.

But the real reason little Timmy has suddenly become antisocial and joined the Billboard Liberation Front is the all-encompassing problem at the root of the game's flaws: Disney Interactive just pumped out a game to make a few bucks rather than trying to bring the thrill of the movie to the computer. A half-hearted attempt to mimic the movie's visual richness, ATLANTIS forgets that kids love to see their action heroes interact with the movie characters; instead, all they get is a handful of pitiful monsters and soldiers to fight for a few hours. Intelligent gameplay—as even the targeted "8 and up" crowd would judge it—seems to have been left off the design document.

These soldiers are on your side at the beginning of the game, but a turn of events has them hunting you later.

While the level design is a distinct cousin to the movie, the Lithtech engine creates a colorful yet oddly bland Atlantis world.

And after all this, multiplayer ATLANTIS online brings absolutely nothing to the game. It's doubly frustrating, and cursing a blue streak on a Disney server just isn't the PC thing to do. (However, I did enjoy inflicting my UNREAL TOURNAMENT skills on the ATLANTIS servers, stopping only after I made seven kids cry and log off, so it wasn't a complete waste....just kidding.)

I also played PlayStation's ATLANTIS, and if little Timmy wants some Atlantis gaming action, the console version is the way to go. There is simply no comparison—the PlayStation is that good. If you don't have a console, fill up the backyard inflatable pool, throw in a few crawdads and tell little Timmy they're Leviathan babies, then give him an egg-beater. He'll be happier when he gets out of that pool than he would be after playing ATLANTIS: TRIAL BY FIRE. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

For once, a crappy game that's kept short.

CONS

Poor controls and level design, lack of Disneyeque fun, and no interactive characters will leave your kids bitter for the rest of their innocent lives.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 64MB RAM, 350MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300 or better, 128MB RAM, 16X or better CD-ROM drive. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet (2-12 players).

Publisher: Disney Interactive • Developer: Zombie • $25 • www.trialbyfiregame.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

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LEADFOOT gets airborne; otherwise, it's the same old Ratbag

Cheap Thrills

Australian developer Ratbag first scurried onto the North American gaming landscape in 1998 with the wheel-spinning, mud-slinging, futuristic racing title POWERSLIDE. Since then, Ratbag has repeatedly capitalized on its distinctive traction-challenged physics model, adapting it for honkin' big contemporary stock cars in 1999's stunningly entertaining DIRT TRACK RACING and for winged little World Of Outlaws monsters in 2000's fast-paced DIRT TRACK RACING: SPRINT CARS. In its latest release, LEADFOOT: STADIUM OFF ROAD RACING, Ratbag showcases a few new vehicles and adds a wonderful sense of vertical movement but generally stays the course, and thus proves that it might have driven down this same muddy road one too many times.

LEADFOOT: STADIUM OFF-ROAD RACING

reviewed by Gord Goble

It's not that LEADFOOT isn't a good racing game. It is, in fact, the pinnacle to which every prior Ratbag title has built. The driving experience is as gritty as they come, the list of user options more extensive than any one player will ever need, and the sensation of blasting through dirt superb. The massive LEADFOOT garage, harboring no less than seven separate adjustable components for each of the four wheel-tire pairings, three more for each corner of the suspension, and several drive train options, works perfectly in sync with the car model and becomes an absolute necessity at the top two difficulty levels. And now, with berms and bumps and gulleys combining to toss you into the air like a cockeyed rag doll and return you to earth with a suspension-jolting crunch, the action is no longer confined to a level playing field.

LEADFOOT's obvious focal point, however, is the Career mode. Here, Ratbag continues to demonstrate that it has a better and more complete approach to the profession of racing than does virtually any other developer. Beginning with a $5,000 modified dune buggy, players will attempt to win events and prize money without further damaging their already decaying equipment. If earnings and corporate sponsorships allow it, they'll shop for high-performance upgrades, repair or replace broken parts, and eventually jump from "stadium lites" to powerful stockers to elite 4x4 trucks. Career mode never lets a bad situation get so out of hand that you're forced to cancel one career and start another, but it does keep the pressure squarely on your shoulders at all times and is thus supremely challenging. Certainly no other racing series has consistently offered so much for such an affordable retail price.

Like DIRT TRACK RACING before it, LEADFOOT is structured to accentuate tight competition.

It's that low price point that has led series veterans to forgive obvious developmental shortcomings. And in LEADFOOT many of those shortcomings linger. Graphically, the game delivers the strangely dark environments and rudimentary lighting effects that have become a Ratbag staple. The vehicles aren't as detailed as were their unspectacular SPRINT CARS predecessors, nor do they exhibit advanced effects such as reflective surfaces or rounded curves and tires. What little damage they sustain is more practical than visual, and that damage seems to accrue randomly. Certainly it seems odd that a tire won't deflate after a 100-mph head-on impact or an engine blow after enduring 10 laps of fully revved first-gear abuse.

Off the track, players are forced to navigate a sea of menu screens just to begin a race and work through countless others if they want to do something as simple as modify and test their vehicle. Interface icons are small and the layout is more confusing than ever. That these deficiencies could and should have been remedied sometime in the last three years goes without saying.

Nevertheless, LEADFOOT's clever mix of arcade action, simulation authenticity, and racing variety should appeal to most PC drivers. The game's hit-or-be-hit GameSpy and dedicated-server multiplayer modes add even more value to an already comprehensive package. Ratbag old hands may not be fully satisfied, but newcomers should find the mud to their liking. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Involving Career mode; impressive aerobatics; tons of options; wild multiplayer racing; well-implemented garage.

CONS

Unsophisticated visuals; murky environments; inconvenient menus; perplexing damage-allocation system.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266MHz, 32MB RAM, 40MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 300, 64MB RAM, 120MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D, OpenGL. **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet (2–7 players).

Publisher: WizardWorks • Developer: Ratbag • $25 • www.ratbaggames.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

Leave your mullet at home; this game is here to challenge you

Misty Mountain Romp

At first glance, OFF-ROAD REDNECK RACING looks like nothing more than another corn-studded piece of budgetware crap, intended to sucker in the same chromosome-deprived WalMart crowd that thinks a singing plastic bass and Hooters restaurants are the two greatest innovations of the 20th century. But upon second glance, REDNECK RACING turns out to be a capable little mud-splatterer, up there with some of the better off-road racing games of late. It's not quite "NEED FOR SPEED in the mud," but it's funner than a greased cousin at a barn dance, nonetheless.

Hey, Ma! Lookit me! I'm in the big truck race at the state fair!

Better Dead Than Red

The keys to success lie in the name: Not too much redneck, but plenty of off-road racing. In fact, take away the gratuitous Confederate battle flags, gun-racks, and porch-stompin' bluegrass music, and this game's neck isn't even a pale pink. No matter; it's a darn fine tootin' arcade racer anyhow, with plenty of backwoods dirt tracks and stripped-down 4x4's right off the cinderblocks in front of a mobile home. I dare say it's one of the best times I've had with an off-road racer this year.

OFFROAD REDNECK RACING

reviewed by Tom Price

Don't expect realistic physics and control—that's not what this game is about. Sure, you can hook up a force-feedback wheel and pretend you're really four-wheelin' with Cletus and Merle, but if you're looking for a game that perfectly recreates the nuance between driving on mud and driving on sand, look elsewhere.

That doesn't mean REDNECK RACING is not challenging. Some of the tracks can be pretty demanding to your twitch reflexes. My favorite set of tracks (there are multiple variations at each track site) is located on a downhill ski run that'll have you plummeting down the bunny slope at 130mph. You can play the tracks in different seasons and different weather conditions for more replayability.

The tracks are also full of shortcuts to help you gain the upper hand over your AI opponents, and trust me, you'll need them. The computer-controlled cars don't just take the best line, they also try to take you out if you pass them. If I could just take one of those guns off the rack...

Squeal Like a Pig

The variety of play modes, plus the inclusion of multiplayer should extend this game's shelf life quite a bit. Modes include time trial and challenge, but the championship season mode is the most fun and rewarding. You progress through the season by winning points, and the more points you win, the more upgrades you get. There are tryouts to join better racing teams (who have better cars and equipment) each season, too.

OFF-ROAD REDNECK RACING is far from being the best unpaved racer out there, but it's a lot better than the name would suggest. Everything about it is polished, from the graphics and interface to the bluegrass soundtrack. Most importantly, the driving action is fast and furious, and offers more challenges than just following the quickest line around a track. The only thing missing is the cultured, sophisticated humor of that other infamous redneck game—and that's hardly missed at all. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Lotsa good ol' down home racin'.

CONS

Graphics can be a bit choppy now and again.

Off-Road Madness

If splashing through the mud is your idea of a good time, check out some of the other off-road racers available.

1NSANE – With play modes that seem more at home in a first-person shooter, 1NSANE's gameplay uniqueness is overshadowed by some pretty amazing physics. And you get to drive an 8-wheeled truck! (*CGW* #201, 4 stars)

4X4 EVOLUTION – If you want to test drive all the latest real-world SUVs from manufacturers like Ford, Nissan, and Lexus, then 4X4 EVO is your game. (*CGW* #199, 4 stars)

MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 – *CGW*'s 2000 Racing Game of the Year, MCM2 is nothing short of sublime, and one of the best motorcycle games, period. (*CGW* #193, 4.5 stars)

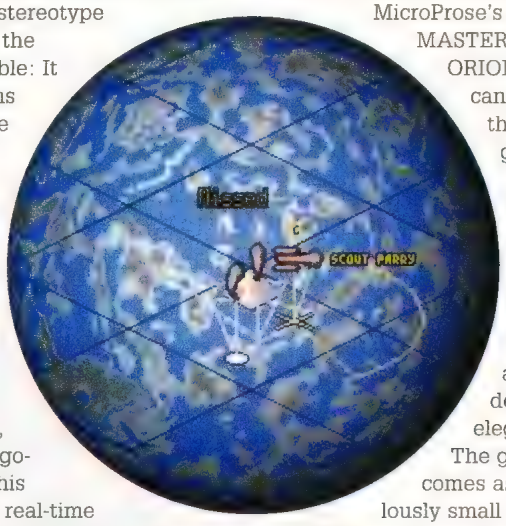
Requirements: Pentium 266, 48MB RAM, 350MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 350, 64MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet.

Publisher: Interplay • Developer: 14° East • $20 • www.interplay.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

STARSHIPS UNLIMITED

Space is a big place—big enough to swallow most empire-building games. One planet is the same as another, and by the time you've colonized your umpteenth mineral colony, the whole thing feels like a consolidated statement of cash flows. STARSHIPS UNLIMITED shatters this stereotype by doing the unthinkable: It transforms the sterile into the compelling through the sheer force of game design.

★★★★



As the title says, the protagonists in this pausable real-time game are the starships. Each has a limited number of weapons slots, and equipping them is eerily like equipping a hero in a role-playing game. Colonial expansion is possible but extremely slow and expensive, so your starships (which gain experience) will be the focus of your strategy. It's an approach that is rarely seen in this genre, but in this case it's stunningly effective.

STARSHIPS UNLIMITED is a typical independent game revelation: It eschews fancy graphics in favor of nailing the gameplay down in a way that rivals space 4X classics like MicroProse's original MASTER OF ORION. If you can get past the dated graphics, you'll be swept away by the strategic complexity and design elegance. The game comes as a ridiculously small (free) 2MB demo download from the STARSHIPS UNLIMITED website, and a full license can be purchased for $25. In gameplay terms, it's an old-fashioned bargain.

—Bruce Geryk

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Apezone • **Developer:** Andrew Ewanycha • $20 • www.apezone.com • **ESRB Rating:** Not rated.

PANZER CAMPAIGNS: TOBRUK '41

John Tiller's PANZER CAMPAIGNS series got its start on the wide-open steppes in SMOLENSK '41. Subsequent iterations didn't quite play to the system's strengths and suffered from some degree of unit density congestion and an excess of scope. With the shift to the desert, the game system's focus on maneuvers is well suited to the warfare that occurred in North Africa. While the result is less successful than you might expect, it's still a good historical recreation of a fascinating topic.

TOBRUK '41 focuses on the battles of Operation Crusader in late 1941, and includes scenarios of famous actions like Rommel's dash to the wire, as well as several campaigns. There are new rules for this desert war, such as excessive vehicle breakdown and the overwhelming importance of supply. The problem is that at this scale, the unit density makes TOBRUK '41 feel a little cramped.

★★★

Then there's the issue of supply. The optional supply rules change the game greatly and have the potential to unbalance it, but also add a lot (when they work). It's one of the pitfalls of designing a game system and then shifting it from Russia to Normandy to Libya: Sometimes the system will start to show strain.

TOBRUK '41 is the first Crusader game since Avalon Hill's OPERATION CRUSADER six years ago, and for desert fans this is reason enough to purchase it. Wargamers without a specific interest in the subject will still find it an involving, challenging game, much like its predecessors in this series.*—Bruce Geryk*

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** HPS Simulations • **Developer:** John Tiller • $40 • www.hpssims.com • **ESRB Rating:** Not rated.

MERCHANT PRINCE 2

MERCHANT PRINCE 2 is the kind of title that gives strategy gaming a bad name. Lured in by the game's atypical Venetian Renaissance setting and the wide-open potential that allows players to engage in commerce, politics, and religion, many a gamer will probably scoop up this TalonSoft title. Hey, the box says this is the sequel to *Computer Games'* magazine strategy game of 1994, right?

★½☆☆☆

Wrong. Consumers (and game reviewers) who don't know that MERCHANT PRINCE 2 is a repackaged re-release of the original—and not a true sequel—will probably feel pretty hoodwinked.

Seven years ago, turn-based strategy games were just beginning to break out of the old school, board-game legacy of using difficult-to-decipher abstract representations to illustrate gameworld events. The consequence was that more mainstream gamers just didn't "get" these types of games. These days, even devout gamers—accustomed to seeing fairly specific details of game events—are going to have a hard time understanding MERCHANT PRINCE 2. The pixilated, clunky graphics don't just look bad and dated; they actually interfere with the game's accessibility. There's so much depth here that if you stick with the game, you'll eventually get it. You might even enjoy it. But the whole time, you'll feel like you're playing an interface rather than making critical decisions and crafting your own epic saga.

It's so discouraging. With a graphics update, a more intuitive, modern design and interface, and a manual that enables rather than confounds, this game could have reincarnated classic experiences like CIVILIZATION or PIRATES. Even today, not many strategy games allow you to win via multiple paths, bribe politicians, become more popular by building a massive villa, and even become Pope.

It's just too bad Take 2 and TalonSoft didn't release this title under a less misleading Classic Gaming label. Mainstream consumers pulled in by the fascinating topic are—once again—going to feel ripped off, confused, dumb, and jaded toward turn-based strategy games.

—George Jones

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Take Two Interactive • **Developer:** Holistic • $30 • www.talonsoft.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

SHATTERED GALAXY

If the current crop of massively multiplayer titles from overseas is any indication, then the clock stopped for Korean game developers in 1996. SHATTERED GALAXY takes an old-school real-time strategy format, adds some role-playing elements, and throws in a few thousand people. Its visuals can charitably be called "brownish." The controls are rudimentarily effective, with the gameplay mired in pre-TOTAL ANNIHILATION simplicity. This makes for quick, brutish encounters without any subtlety or nuance.

★★☆☆☆

At its highest level (that is, before you actually play) SHATTERED GALAXY has intriguing, promising mechanics. You begin with a "hero": a non-fighting character whose attributes affect his ability to assemble and command a fighting force. He joins others in a faction, fighting opposing factions in hotspots across a strategic map while increasing his rank through victories. These battles yield tribute—used to buy, repair, and upgrade the wide array of air, mobile, and infantry units.

All of these elements are quite interesting, if cumbersome. But the RTS engine where you spend most of your time is rather lifeless. While it can support 50 people in a battle, even the advanced units can't quite alter the "click-to-attack" mediocrity. Throwing dozens of gamers, each with their own squad of units, onto a series of uninteresting maps with no resources results in cramped, confusing combat encounters. Though peppered with interesting elements, the core experience doesn't pack enough punch to meet the demands of a pay-to-play game. *—Thomas L. McDonald*

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Nexon • **Developer:** Nexon • $29.99; $9.95 per month • www.sgalaxy.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen

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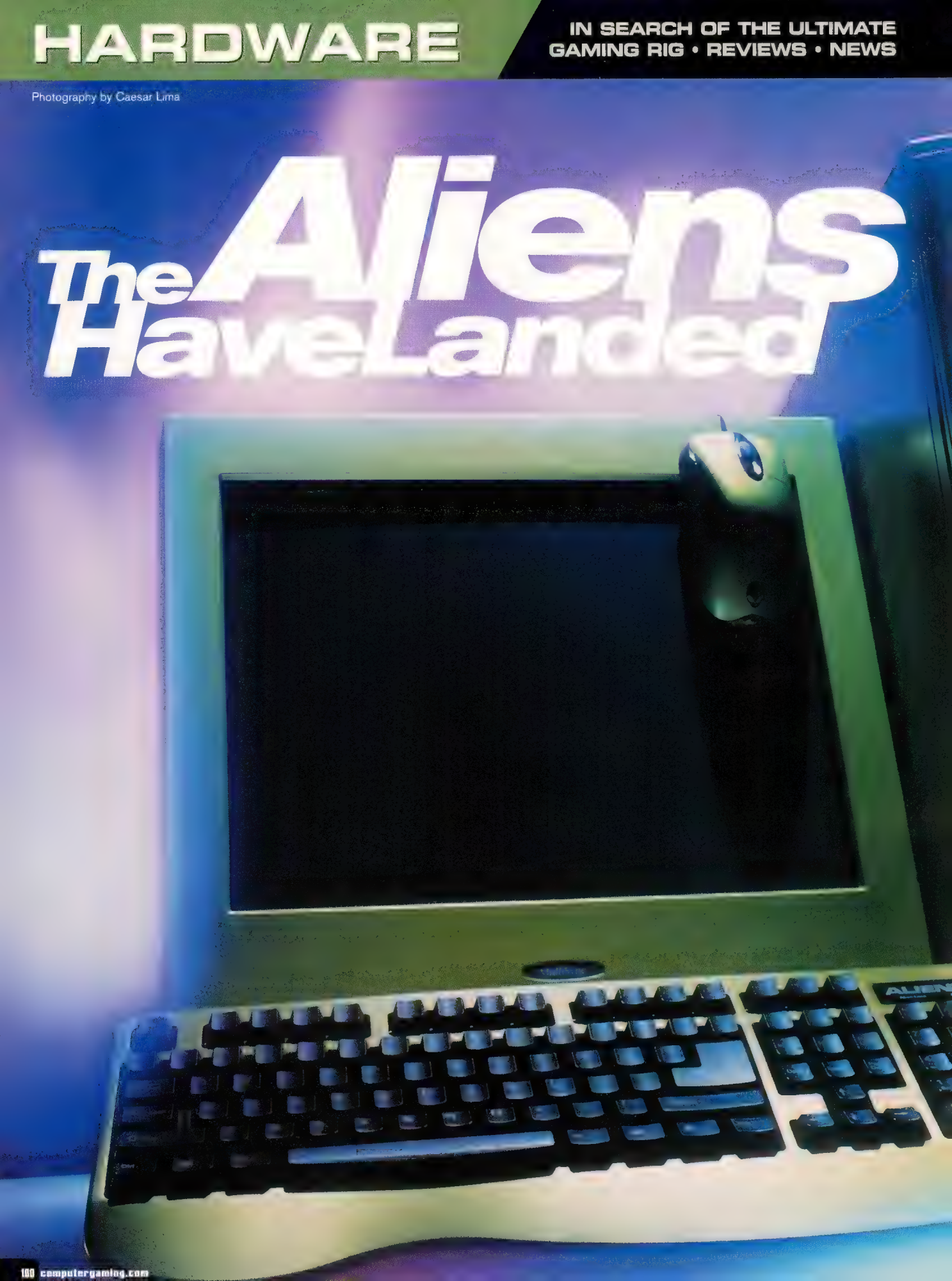
Photography by Caesar Lima

The Aliens Have Landed



Intel vs. AMD

Whose CPU's the fastest, the cheapest, and the best?

Every month we get dozens of emails from readers asking if they should buy Intel or AMD-powered gaming rigs. The performance gap between the two competitors' flagship CPUs is for all intents and purposes negligible, so this is one of those preference-based questions like "Should I buy a Chevy or a Ford pickup?" Since I'm known to roam the streets of San Francisco running down the occasional dot-commer in my Ford Ranger, it's obvious that I'm partial to the blue oval. But does this mean that Chevys aren't good at taking out some overpaid sap in his girlfriend's Subaru Outback? Wait a minute—I'm getting ahead of myself. Ask anyone which chip is better for your gaming needs and you're likely to get a similarly ridiculous hunk o' logic. We decided that the best way to solve this age-old dilemma was with a good old-fashioned knock-down, drag-'em-out fight to the death. In other words, we decided to put the CPUs through our standard barrage of tests: 3D WinBench 2000, CGW's GameGauge 2.5, and hours and hours of HALF-LIFE: COUNTER-STRIKE..

Let's Get Ready to Rumble!

We called up our buddies at Alienware and had them send over two similarly configured machines: one beating with a 1.7GHz Intel Pentium 4 heart, and the other with a 1.4GHz AMD Athlon.

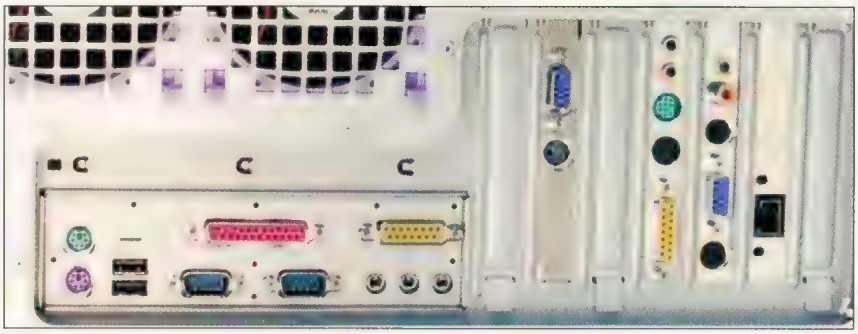
In the blue corner we have the champ, Intel. While it's safe to say that Intel's hubris is poising the Santa Clara–based company to take a Hasim Rahman–like jab (the likes of which ended Lennox Lewis' reign as heavyweight champ), the fact remains: its stuff is pretty friggin' good.

And in the green corner we have the challenger, AMD. While Intel has left gamers feeling like bastard stepchildren, AMD has proved its loyalty to gamers time and again by doing things like sponsoring professional gaming tournaments and—hold your breath—having a presence at this year's E3.

With two fans in the rear, one on the side (shown at right), and one on the front—that's four—these Alienware rigs easily have more fans than Tony Danza.

The back of the AMD machine—below—shows off an Ethernet port as well as the Philips Acoustic Edge 5.1 sound card.

With matching monitors, cases, keyboards, and mice, both rigs look fresh and clean.



Pros

Cons

AMD 1.4GHz Athlon

★★★★★

- 256MB PC2100 DDR RAM
- AMD 761 DDR-based motherboard
- 64MB GeForce3 graphics card
- Philips Acoustic Edge 5.1 sound card
- Cambridge Desktop Theater DTT3500 5.1 speakers
- 61GB hard drive
- Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM drive
- Plextor 16x/10x/40x CD-RW drive
- 19" NEC Multisync monitor
- MS Sidewinder Force Feedback Pro

Price: $2,899

It's All About the Benjamins—or in This Case, the Numbers

Right out of the box it appeared as though the champ's hubris was, in fact, justified self-confidence. The P4 bested the Athlon in Ziff Davis' 3D WinBench 2000, scoring a solid 216 WinMarks against the Athlon's 207 (note: 207 is an awesome 3D WinMark 2000 score). Then we fired up the games and things got interesting.

As our benchmark results show, neither CPU is a clear-cut winner; basically, the choice comes down to three things: which games you are playing, how much money you are willing to spend, and personal preference or loyalty.

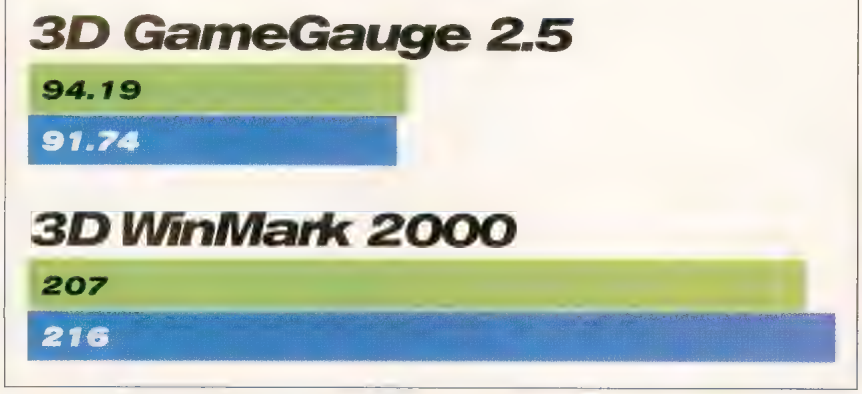
Three of our test games—QUAKE III ARENA, RE*VOLT, and EXPENDABLE—yielded vastly different results. While the Athlon dominated our EXPENDABLE test, the P4 machine blew the Athlon away in QUAKE III ARENA. While this outcome appears to sing the praises of the Pentium, it's due more to the fact that John Carmack—when he created the original QUAKE engine—designed it to take full advantage of the Pentium architecture. Furthermore, QUAKE III ARENA is GameGauge's only OpenGL test.

All things (such as price) being equal, picking a winner would be difficult. But seeing that all things are not equal (price again), picking a winner wasn't difficult. With negligible performance differences, the Athlon, at $500 less than the P4, is the clear-cut winner. Think of all the lap dances you could get with that extra $500.

The Benchmarks

AMD 1.4 GHz Athlon

Intel 1.7 GHz Pentium 4



$3,399 | Alienware | www.alienware.com

Pros

The fastest 3D WinMark 2000 score I've ever seen; Intel CPUs are bombproof.

Cons

Costs $500 more than a similarly configured Athlon machine.

Intel 1.7GHz Pentium 4

★★★★★

- 256MB PC800 RDRAM
- ASUS P4T 850 Chipset motherboard
- 64MB GeForce3 graphics card
- Sound Blaster Live! Platinum sound card
- Klipsch ProMedia 4.1 speakers
- 61GB hard drive
- Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM drive
- Plextor 16x/10x/40x CD-RW drive
- 19" NEC Multisync monitor
- Saitek X35/X36F controllers

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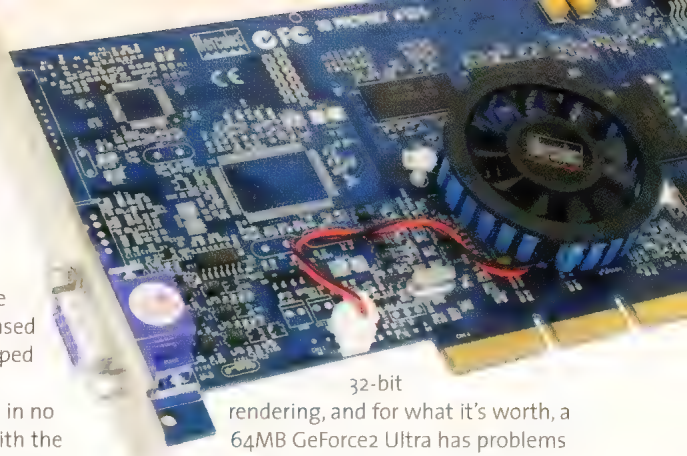


An entry-level graphics card that kicks ass!

3D Prophet 4500 64MB

★★★★½

With the release of nVidia's GeForce3 GPU, that card seems to be the only one anyone is talking about. But what if, like many people, you don't have $400 to $500 to spend on a graphics card? Hercules is hoping to address that issue with its latest entry-level graphics card, the 3D Prophet 4500 64MB.

With a retail price of $150, my first thought was that the 3D Prophet 4500 64MB would be "budget" in more ways than one. Thankfully, I was shocked.

$150 | Hercules | www.hercules.com

Pros

Excellent card, considering its price point.

Cons

Not as fast as GeForce2 Ultra- or GeForce3-based cards.

Requirements

Pentium II or AMD-K6 or compatible; available AGP 2.0-compliant slot; Windows 95OSR2, 98, 2000, or ME.

Sporting 64MB of DRAM, the 3D Prophet 4500 64MB is based on the Kyro II chipset developed by ST Microelectronics and PowerVR. While the Kyro II is in no way expected to compete with the higher-end nVidia offerings, it does have all the bells and whistles that gamers have come to expect from a graphics card—like Full Scene Anti-Aliasing (FSAA), Environmental Bump Mapping (EBM), and Z-buffering.

But enough about that. What's really important is how the 3D Prophet 4500 64MB performs in the real world: with games. We installed the 3D Prophet 4500 64MB in the 1.33GHz Athlon machine from Wolop.com that we reviewed a few months ago and, well, the thing kicks ass. As the benchmark results show, the 3D Prophet 4500 64MB is a perfectly capable gaming option. While it was clearly blown out of the water in Ziff Davis' 3D WinBench 2000, if you're playing games like QUAKE III ARENA, UNREAL TOURNAMENT, or HALF-LIFE: COUNTER-STRIKE, you'll be happy with the 3D Prophet 4500 64MB.

Its biggest problem seems to be with 32-bit rendering, and for what it's worth, a 64MB GeForce2 Ultra has problems (relatively speaking, of course) with 32-bit rendering as well.

When all is said and done, there's little to knock the 3D Prophet 4500 64MB for. Sure, we've grown accustomed to GeForce3-type numbers, but those'll set you back a couple of C notes. For anyone who's looking to upgrade from anything less than a GeForce2 Ultra—but who doesn't like the idea of laying down that GeForce3 money—the 3D Prophet 4500 64MB is an excellent option. —*William O'Neal*

The Benchmarks

3D GameGauge 2.5 Scores

94.27 GeForce2 Ultra

100.58 GeForce3

90.55 3D Prophet 4500

Yamaha TSS-1

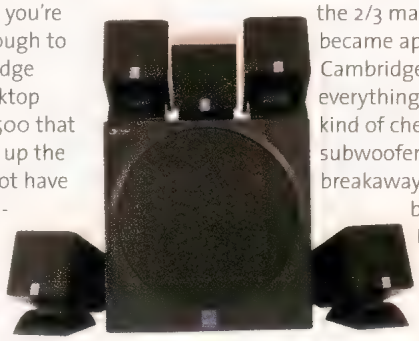
Home Theater on a Budget

★★★★★

5.1-channel speakers for under $200?! It sounds almost too good to be true, doesn't it? Well, in the case of the Yamaha TSS-1 Home Theater Sound System, we're ambivalent. On the one hand, in this price range 5.1-channel speakers that boast everything from optical and coaxial digital options to your more standard front and rear analog options are fantastic. The thing is, at nearly $200 you're getting close enough to the $300 Cambridge Soundworks Desktop Theater 5.1 DTT3500 that we'd rather pony up the extra $100 and not have to make any compromises.

We tested the Yamaha TSS-1 system on two machines: one equipped with Hercules' Gametheater XP for watching DVDs and a more typical gaming rig equipped with a Sound Blaster Live! sound card for gaming and listening to music

The TSS-1 did a great job of decoding the 5.1 signal while playing DVDs like *The Matrix*, *Gladiator*, and *Saving Private Ryan* at moderate sound levels. However, once we cranked the volume to anything past the 2/3 mark, the TSS-1's limitations became apparent. Unlike the Cambridge Soundworks system, everything in the TSS-1 package felt kind of cheap, from the satellites and subwoofer all the way down to the breakaway amplifier. And the sound began to get a little tinny at higher levels. The gaming experience too was fine as long as we weren't cranking the sounds too high.



$200 | Yamaha | www.yamaha.com

The TSS-1 really shines, though, when it comes to flexibility. You'd be hard pressed to find a sound source that can't hook up to these speakers. The breakaway amplifier even boasts a headphone jack that (amazingly) sounds really good. —*William O'Neal*

Pros

Inexpensive for a 5.1-channel sound system; a gang of input options.

Cons

Not nearly as awesome as the Cambridge Soundworks Desktop Theater 5.1 DTT3500.

Requirements

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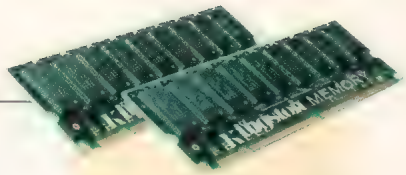

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RumbleFX headphones

Sound With Style

★★★★★

Every now and then someone adds unique features to an already familiar product and makes it better. In this case, Evergreen Technologies has taken a decent set of headphones and added a force-feedback rumbling effect so that gamers can enjoy heart-pounding explosions and crashes without waking their roommates. More importantly, gamers can actually "feel" the game.

RumbleFX headphones are simple to use. Just put in the included batteries (and hope they work), plug into your sound port, adjust the base controller, and you're ready to rock. Making use of a DSP, the headphones pick up the low frequencies in games and transform them into vibrations using a bass-activated force-feedback system, letting the wearer experience rumbling sensations. In MECHWARRIOR 4, I could feel the planet shake as an enemy Mech charged me. My head was reeling for hours afterward, simply due to those rumbling effects.

The sound quality was also exceptional. The RumbleFX has a load rating of 500mW with a sensitivity of 102dB, so there's a good amount of clarity at higher volumes. During UNREAL TOURNAMENT, for example, I was able to pinpoint an enemy's position from the sound of rounds whizzing past me through the din of rocket explosions. The only blemish appeared when playing MP3s, whose midrange sound was slightly muted.

After hours of use, I found the headphones just as comfortable on my head as when I first donned them, which speaks tomes about their quality. Also, the RumbleFX can plug into other devices with standard output jacks—MP3 players, CD players, TVs, consoles, and more—using the included adapter. With all the benefits, especially for gamers, the RumbleFX headphones are definitely worth the $49.

—Raphael Liberatore

$49 | Evergreen Technologies | www.rumblefx.com

Pros

Build quality and sound acoustics rock.

Cons

Midrange a tad muted; a set of working batteries would have been nice.

Requirements

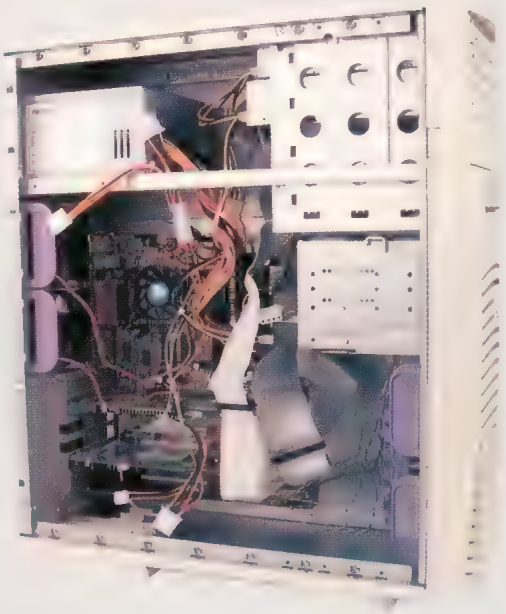
166MHz Pentium-class computer; 32MB RAM; Mac compatible.

Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building your ultimate gaming machine

Component	Manufacturer/Model	Price
Case	Antec SX-830	$80
Motherboard	ASUS A7A266	$150
CPU	1.4GHz AMD Athlon	$200
Memory	Crucial 256MB PC133 SDRAM	$100
Graphics Card	VisionTek GeForce3	$350
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$25
Hard Drive	Maxtor DiamondMax 80GB Ultra ATA (7200 RPM)	$250
CD-R	Plextor PlexWriter 16/10/40A	$200
CD-ROM/DVD	Creative PC-DVD Encore 12x	$140
Monitor	KDS VS-21e 21"	$450
Sound Card	Hercules Game Theater XP	$150
Speakers	Altec Lansing ADA890 Dolby Digital THX Certified Speaker System	$300
Modem	Actiontec 56K PCI Pro Modem	$50
Keyboard/Mouse	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro with IntelliMouse Optical	$75
Joystick	Saitek Cyborg USB Gold Stick	$40
Game Pad	Thrustmaster FireStorm Dual Power	$30
	Total	$2590

Not So Killer Looking



Aside from lower prices—and fixing a horrible typo that appeared in last month's *Killer Rigs*—there are no changes to my Power Rig or Lean Machine. I did, however, compare my work with some of the prebuilt rigs from the likes of Voodoo Computers (to be reviewed next month) and the two Alienware machines that we reviewed this month, and it's obvious that I need to work on my cabling.

Wil Power

Competition is good for everything—except my liver.

Competition is a trip. Balancing on the line between obsession and motivation, it forces us to "keep on our toes"—whether we're fighting, doing tequila shots, or running the hardware section of a computer gaming magazine.

Every month I get a copy of *PC Gamer* (the proverbial thorn in our collective side) and immediately flip to the hardware section to see what *Gamer's* hardware editor, Greg Vederman, is up to. While I've never met Vederman, I feel as though we share a strange sense of camaraderie as well as a serious sense of competition. On one hand, we're sort of in this thing together, trying to give our readers (many of whom are the same people) the best information possible, often amid a deluge of skewed numbers and PR technobabble. On the other hand, if Vederman's hardware section begins to be perceived as somehow "better than mine," I'm screwed.

Sometimes I read his section and get frustrated. For instance, in the July issue of *Gamer*, Vederman reviewed a 1.7GHz Intel-based Alienware machine similar to the one we reviewed this month. "Damn!" I thought, "The bastard got me." But then reality kicked in and I realized that our stories were completely different. As I continued through his section I saw that he reviewed the Hercules Game Theater XP, a sound card that we reviewed in June, and thought, "Sweet, I got him."

A few months ago, my competitive nature kicked in when I ran into *PC Gamer's* editor-in-chief, Rob Smith, at an event here in San Francisco. All in good fun, I said, "Hey Rob, I'm thinking of kicking Vederman's ass at this year's E3. Think I can take him?" I'll leave it to Rob (ednote@pcgamer.com) to answer that question for you.

While I don't intend to fight Vederman (someone recently told me he's like 6 feet 8), if I do run into him, he will go down in a mountain of empty shot glasses, lime wedges, and spilled salt. —*William O'Neal*

TECH You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

Mother (Board) Knows Best!

I am going to build a new Athlon system. I noticed the local computer store has the ASUS A7 PRO, but you have been recommending the ASUS A7V for an Athlon-based system. What's the difference? Which is better? The A7 PRO is fairly cheap. I am also curious as to whether it will use the new DDR memory. I hear that it is very fast.

I haven't built a system with an A7 PRO so I can't say for sure. I recommend the ASUS A7A266 because it has two DDR slots as well as three SDRAM slots. And the box that it ships in is this fabulous shade of yellow.

All in the Family

My brother and I have a 700MHz Intel Celeron with 64MB SDRAM and a 30GB Ultra DMA hard drive. Our computer runs DIABLO II and THE SIMS just fine but he thinks we should upgrade it with extra RAM and a new video card. What should we do?

You should definitely upgrade to at least 128MB RAM. As for your video card, whether or not you should upgrade depends on the one that you're currently running. If it's anything less than, say, a 32MB GeForce2 MX or ATI Radeon, then yes, upgrade the video card too.

They Grow Up Fast These Days!

I'm a 15-year-old interested in getting a notebook for school as well as personal use. I've looked at all kinds and can't decide what's best for me. I'm working under a ballpark $1,500 budget, so don't get too carried away. I would like to know brand suggestions as well as some hardware ideas (processors, drives, graphics, and so on).

P.S. I love your section in the magazine. It's always the first part I read.

When I was 15, all I wanted was a new BMX bike. Anyway, I'm partial to Dell and Gateway notebooks—I've used both. Right now I'm really into the notebooks with the GeForce2GO chipset. These rigs are by far the raddest notebooks I've ever played with. The thing is, though, they're at least $2,000. For your price range I'd suggest looking into the Dell Inspiron 8000 or the Gateway Solo 5300. Just remember that games won't look nearly as good as they do on your desktop machine or on one of the higher-end notebooks.

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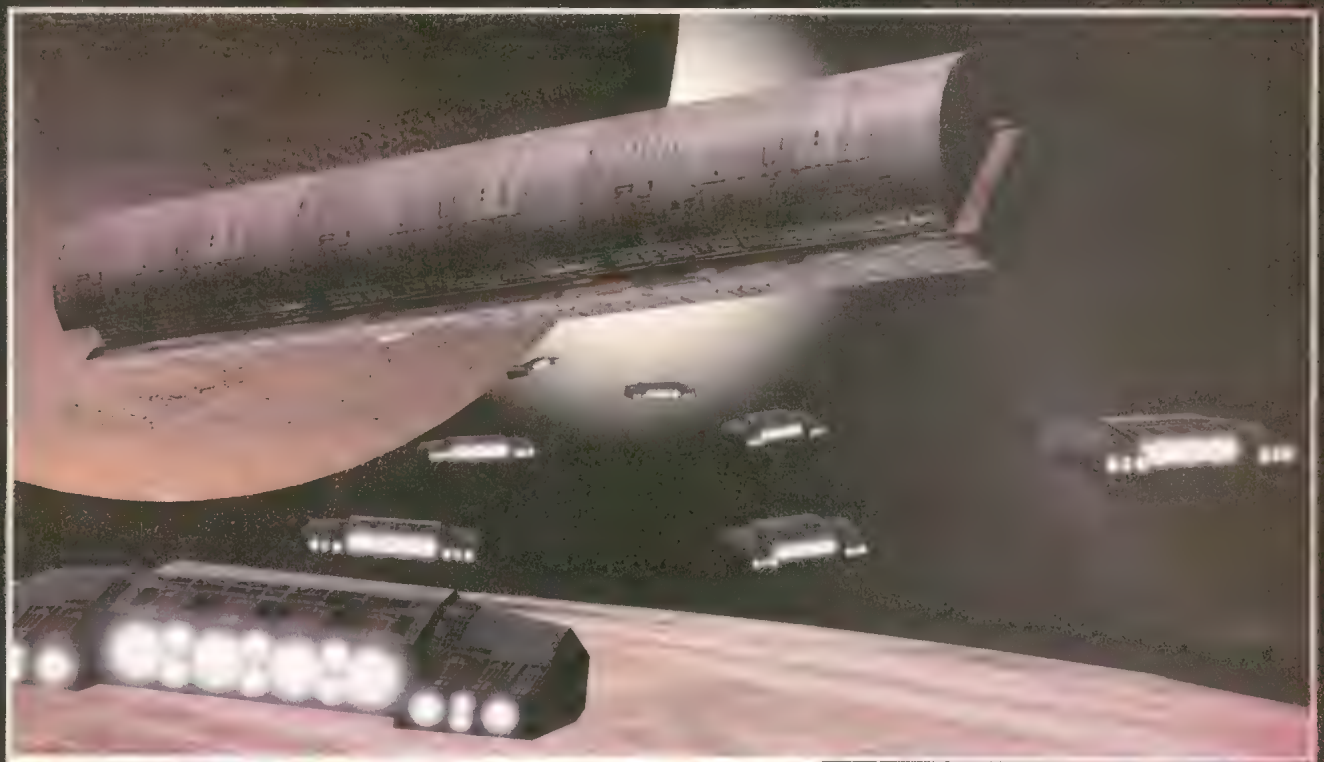

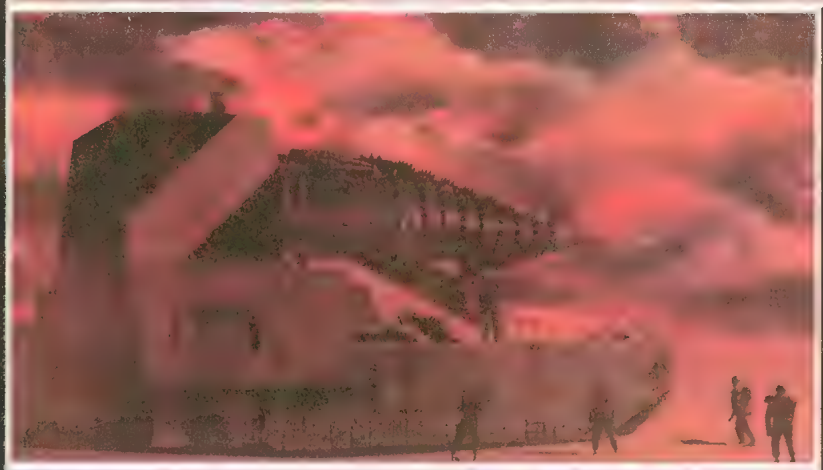

emperor: battle for DUNE

Computer Gaming World and Prima Games has teamed up to give you the complete guide to all the scripted missions on Arrakis

PLUS

BLACK & WHITE STRATEGIES

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THE SCRIPTED MISSIONS

many of your missions on arrakis are random. however, each house has three that are planned, and they're the same every time (though they're different from house to house). the first scripted mission is the introductory mission you undertake for each house. the second scripted mission takes place on a guild heighliner, after you attack and defend a territory for the first time. after your second attack and defense mission, you'll undertake the third scripted mission, which takes place on your house's homeworld.

EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE

STRATEGY GUIDE

BY STEVE HONEYWELL

PRIMA GAMES

House Atreides: The Beginning

While your Mentat briefs you as the new commander of Atreides forces on Arrakis, the Duke walks by. He suggests that you be given a trial by fire rather than wasting time with words; this means that they'll throw you into battle to see how well you survive.

In your first battle, you deal with a small Harkonnen force. Your base starts out fairly well developed, with plenty of troops, defenses, and structures. The Harkonnen attack immediately, but your forces at the front of the base handle the attack easily. You lose a few units, but that shouldn't concern you, as long as you protect the Mongooses. Have them assault the Harkonnen Buzzsaws, and pull them back when the Harkonnen infantry move in. While the Harkonnen move toward your base, build a few infantry units and start work on a Factory.

After you've built the Factory, place it and create a couple of Sand Bikes, routing them to the front of your base. They help push back the remaining infantry in the first Harkonnen rush. When the first attack is over, a huge group of Buzzsaws appear at the map's far end. You don't have much time to prepare for them, so build what you can. An additional Machine Gun Post and extra Sand Bikes help. Repel the invasion, leading with the Mongooses. The attack centers on your base's northeastern corner, so move your troops and place additional defenses there.

Around the time the large Harkonnen rush appears, you get your first group of reinforcements. They appear to the north

After the big Buzzsaw attack, a small group of Harkonnen appear from the left. Watch them move toward you; then you see a worm attack. When this attack is over, your second group of reinforcements appears.

of your base. Let them sit for now and wait until you get the second group of reinforcements. That way, you have a very large force of both Sand Bikes and Mongooses. Select all of these reinforcements and direct them toward the map's center. You can have them destroy any of the wrecked vehicles they encounter, but you don't need the extra money for this mission.

Don't worry too much about the small Harkonnen positioned is in the middle of the map. First, focus on the force of Buzzsaws and infantry. Move your force slowly so that the Mongooses arrive at roughly the same time as the Sand Bikes, letting you balance your attack against the Harkonnen. Once the enemy forces are down, destroy everything in the area. There's plenty of money to pick up in the form of crates. Use the barrels near many of the structures to destroy the Harkonnen buildings quickly.

You now have a choice: You can attack the main Harkonnen base from either the north or south. Of the two, the north is more firmly defended, but the south entrance is narrower and harder to reach. The north is preferable because you can move all of your vehicles in across a broad front.

Move your vehicles toward the Harkonnen base slowly, and send them all in at once, keeping the Mongooses near the Sand Bikes for protection. As with the small central base, use the barrels to destroy the Harkonnen position quickly. After you've destroyed all the significant Harkonnen structures (everything but the Flame Turrets and the Windtraps), the mission will end in victory.

Aboard the Heighliner

After your first attack and defense mission, you receive a transmission from the trading Guild. Your troops en route to Arrakis have been hijacked, which defies the Great Convention. Because of that, the Guild gives you permission to retaliate against both House Ordos and House Harkonnen. Your troops will board the Heighliner and reclaim their missing comrades. Along the way, you have complete freedom to dispose of any Ordos or Harkonnen you encounter.

A number of missing Atreides ships are on the Heighliner. Each time you destroy the enemy troops surrounding one of your ships, you'll get a few reinforcements. You start with only four Snipers, but they'll be enough to handle the enemies that face you at the start. Move your four Snipers up the ramp to the southeast—the only direction open to them. As they move through this raised area, you should spot a pair of Harkonnen Light Infantry on the ground below. Move a couple of your Snipers ahead to pick off the two Light Infantry. Then, move your force down the ramp and into the next area. Move forward until you find the large ramp leading up, with two paths branching off to each side. More Harkonnen are on the path on the right. Take them down and send one of your Snipers to the ship. You pick up a trio of Light Infantry once you reach the ship. Send another Sniper up the path on the left to claim the Sardaukar. These troops are particularly useful in the areas ahead. When you're ready, send your force up the large ramp.

Follow the ramps until you reach the Harkonnen troopers. Pick them off with one of your Snipers and continue moving your group. There's no way to get lost here, since there is only one direction to go. Move past the Harkonnen Frigate to the Atreides Frigate beyond. This is guarded by a group of Ordos AA Troopers, who are no problem for even a single Sniper. Mow them down and move to the Frigate to claim another Sniper and a Light Infantry. As you claim these troops, you're told that there are two more of your ships in the area.

Of course, security forces are everywhere. Just beyond the Frigate is a pair of

Using the barrels is the most efficient way to take out the structures. That's particularly true of the Harkonnen Flame Turrets, which damage your vehicles if you don't remove them immediately.

Rescue the Duke

Following your second attack and defense mission, your negotiations with the Fremen continue. The next step in the process is meeting with the Fremen leaders on Caladan, the Atreides homeworld. Unfortunately, treachery is afoot. As the Duke and Fremen leaders reach the planet, Tleilaxu Gholas and Face Dancers ambush them. Protect the Duke and the Fremen from the assassins.

This mission isn't difficult if you take your time and play carefully. Rushing forward gets your troops slaughtered quickly. The Tleilaxu Face Dancers are essentially Snipers, which makes them difficult to kill. Be patient and work slowly to get your forces through to the end of the mission. Start by moving your troops north to the small base. You have a few seconds before anything happens. Run your three third-level Snipers into the Barracks and start producing more Snipers. All of the Snipers you produce from this point forward will be third level, which means they'll be quite powerful. Produce as many as you can (at least six) and a single Scout.

Once you have these units, start selling off structures and producing more Snipers. Get rid of the Outpost first, followed by the Machine Gun Post, and then the Windtraps. Build as many Snipers as you can. When you don't have enough money to build more, build Light Infantry. If you don't have enough for Light Infantry, build another Scout. When the ship arrives to the north of the base, wait until you're out of money, then send a single unit to investigate. As your unit approaches, the ship explodes. Move your troop back to the base and send your entire force to the southeast. Soon after the sabotage at the ship, any structures still at the base will explode too. You must move your force along the road to another small base. This trip only has one sticking point. Move your Scout forward until you spot the assassins in the south. Then, move a group of Snipers down to pick them off. You'll lose a few Snipers doing this, but you should get through the assassins quickly. Once they're dead, move the entire force across the land bridge and send them northeast.

Destroy the central Harkonnen position. It's not the mission's main thrust, but it's good practice.

Harkonnen Light Infantry. Once they're down, move in carefully and take out the Harkonnen troops that attack from your left. More troops are to the right, so be careful. If you have one or two second-level Snipers, they can take care of these troops quickly.

Search through this entire area. Two more of your ships are in this area—both add troops to your force. You get a single Light Infantry and three Kindjal Infantry at the top ship and two more Light Infantry and a Sniper at the bottom ship. When you claim both of these ships, you're told to find the rest of the captives before you're done. Move your force down from the bottom ship, sending one Sniper ahead to scout.

What you find is something of a predicament. Off to the right, a Harkonnen Gun Turret protects the hallway. The hallway itself is blocked by an Energy Gate, which you must destroy. Take out the Turret first. To do so, have your Sniper shoot the barrels next to it. Then, move him back and have him shoot the barrels near the gate. The resulting explosion destroys the gate and takes out the two Harkonnen beyond. Move past where the gate was and take out the Gun Turret lurking to the left. Send your whole force in when it's safe.

Just beyond this area is a large room containing Harkonnen and Ordos units. Of greatest significance are the Harkonnen Assault Tanks and Buzzsaws. Destroy them by targeting the barrels near them. Take out the Buzzsaws on the left first. As you move around the outside of the room, past the Harkonnen Frigates, you encounter one of yours, with a trio of Mongooses inside. Beware of the six Harkonnen Troopers standing to the right. As you take this final Frigate, you pick up a Repair Vehicle and four Light Infantry. You find out that the Harkonnen captured General Formarch; Rescue him.

The exit from this area is in the room's bottom right, behind another Energy Gate; destroy it with a handy barrel. Move your troops up the ramp, and down the ramp to the left. More Harkonnen are here, including a Flamethrower Infantry, so be cautious. At the end of the next corridor, find another Energy Gate. You can't destroy this one with barrels, so do the job with your Mongooses. Move a Sniper into the next area and approach the Frigate where the Harkonnen are holding the general captive. You were told he was heavily guarded—not an understatement. The guard comprises a few Harkonnen troops and a Devastator, the single-largest unit on the battlefield. Fortunately, you've got barrels. Use a Sniper (a third-level, if you can) to take out the barrels near the Devastator. Destroying this machine will take a couple explosions. When the Devastator is down, mop up any Harkonnen infantry in the area, then move a unit to the Frigate. Once you reach it, the mission ends in success.

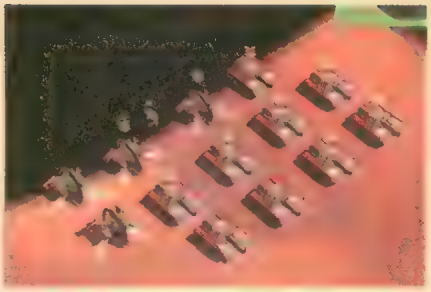
This mission ends with the "Rescue the Duke" sidebar above.

House Harkonnen starting out

Your first mission as the new House Harkonnen strategist is a simple one, much like the first Atreides mission. You square off against Atreides forces in this mission.

When the mission starts, you have a few structures already in place. Start building a Factory and create a few infantry units while the Atreides attack. Route these new infantry units to the northern part of your base. Because both vehicles and infantry units will hit you, mix your production between Light Infantry and Troopers. As with the first Atreides mission, you get a glimpse of a worm attack. As soon as the worm strikes and swallows a small Atreides patrol, you get more reinforcements. Take all of your reinforcements and move them straight toward the Atreides base at the map's far end. You encounter some additional Atreides units when you march on their base. They shouldn't be much of a problem. Your Buzzsaws handle the infantry quickly while your tanks take out any attacking Atreides vehicles.

The force you have should be far more than you need to take out the Atreides base. Move in, using the barrels to take out the structures. Pay particular attention to the Machine Gun Posts, because they're your troops' biggest threat. Once you've taken care of everything, the mission ends.



This massive force is more than enough to destroy the Atreides.

Breaking the Great Convention

As your troops move toward Arrakis, the Baron suggests a unique and dangerous mission. Rather than waiting until you reach Dune, he suggests attacking the Atreides and Ordos now, while they're still on the Heighliner. True, this does violate the Great Convention, but if a Harkonnen is put on the Lion Throne, pardons are easily acquired.

You have a sizable force to start, including several Troopers, Light Infantry, and Flamethrower Infantry. Move them left, to the small ramp leading up. About a minute after the mission starts, you're warned that you're violating the Great Convention. To prevent the fighting, the Guild jettisons all Frigates in the area into space in fifteen minutes. Work quickly to destroy everything.

The area beyond the ramp is a long dead end. However, because your orders are to clear all enemy forces and destroy all of the Frigates, you must go down this path. Clear the entire area with a Trooper and a Flamethrower. Move one of each up the

directly to the base. Attack only if the enemy attacks first.

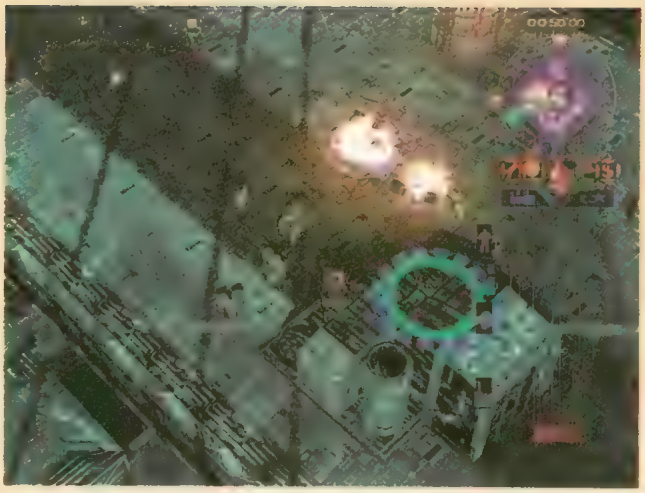
When you reach the second base, you get more money. Additional Snipers are a good investment. Around the same time you start building more Snipers, a group of four Sand Bikes and two Minotauruses reinforce you in the south. Move those units north, taking on anything within range. Expect to lose most of the units to a large group of enemy troops. Hold off the enemies with the Minotauruses and move the Sand Bikes through. Send any vehicles north until they reach the small town.

You must protect the civilians in this town. Any Sand Bikes you have do an excellent job against the Tleilaxu troops in the area. Surviving civilians run for your base, and a group of Tleilaxu south of the town pursue. Move your Snipers into position near the front of your base to protect the civilians.

You should have little trouble fighting off the Tleilaxu pursuing the civilians. You get a pair of Minotauruses to help out around the same time the civilians arrive. Use those and groups of Snipers to mop up any remaining enemies. When the last Tleilaxu is dead, the mission ends in success.

Sell most of this base's structures for additional funds.

ramp and dispatch the enemies at the top. Move the rest of your units near the Energy Gate. Continue with the Trooper and Flamethrower. At the end of the ramps, they'll reach an Energy Gate. Use the Trooper to destroy the gate by targeting the barrels. Move in your two units and start attacking anything that moves. Your Flamethrower will have a field day while your Trooper concentrates on shooting more barrels to add to the destruction. An Atreides Frigate is in this area. Destroy it by shooting the barrels around it. Use the Flamethrower to take out any survivors, then send him back to your main force near where you started.



A single Trooper and Flamethrower can handle this long dead end.

Your Trooper still has a little work ahead of him. Move him to the top of the small ramp near the destroyed Frigate. If he shoots the barrels he can reach, he'll take out a couple of Dust Scouts. He should also destroy an Ordos Frigate in the same general area. When he's done, send him up to rejoin the main force.

As this Trooper is returning, have your other Troopers target the Energy Gate blocking the path. Once it's down, move your troops through. Take out the next group of barrels and work your way down to the Energy Gate. This one doesn't have barrels near it, so you shoot the gate to destroy it.

Beyond this gate is a horde of Tleilaxu scientists and a few more Ordos Frigates. The Frigate directly across from you is important; take it out and you reveal a small ramp behind it. Send a single Trooper to shoot anything he can in the room beyond the ramp. You eventually lose him to an Atreides Sniper, but he should hit a few barrels before he goes down.

The bulk of your force should move left from the last Energy Gate you destroyed. Down the hall, you come to a few more gates. The one on the right looks tempting, but there's a Sniper behind it. Take out the ones on the left instead and move your troops through. Take them all the way to the end of the hall, targeting the barrels along the way to kill the Militia.

At the end of the hall, take a small force to knock out the Energy Gate on the left. It leads into the area you started clearing at the beginning of the mission (the open area just inside is where you destroyed the Dust Scouts). Move in and take out everything before returning this force to the main group. As they're returning, have your troops destroy the second Energy Gate at the T-intersection, then move in and destroy the one in the room beyond.

This large room looks dangerous, but it really isn't. A group of Light Infantry can take out the Militia guarding the Sardaukar on the left. Adding these Sardaukar to your force makes you much more powerful. Use the barrels to take out the Energy Gates on the right, most of the enemies, and the Atreides Frigate. Send a small force up from the large room. Take the barrels out around the Sardaukar to get rid of the Sniper you avoided earlier; collect the Sardaukar to add to your forces. Move everyone down to the wreckage of the last Atreides Frigate and start them toward the top of the map, destroying the Ordos Frigate on the way.

Blasting your way through the next set of Energy Gates leads to a can of worms. The area beyond is crawling with Atreides, including Snipers. Send in your new Sardaukar force to wipe them out. Get shots off before the Snipers; even if you lose a couple troops, you still have the upper hand.

The Atreides Frigate in this area is the last ship to destroy. You're told to move your troops to the closest Harkonnen Frigate for protection. Conveniently, a Harkonnen ship is nearby. Move your troops up to it and you'll complete the mission, hopefully with a minute or two to spare.

civil war

While Gunseng Harkonnen, the Baron's younger son, is stationed on Arrakis, plots are brewing back home on Giedi Prime. Copec, the older son, has assassinated the Baron and seized the barony. The two brothers' long history of feuding is now out in the open. Civil war is imminent.

You must choose between the two brothers. Gunseng seems to be the smarter of the two, but Copec is the new Baron. Whomever you select is the one to rule House Harkonnen—assuming you defeat the other in a battle on Giedi Prime.

fighting for copec

As the new Baron, Copec starts with a reinforced position on Giedi Prime, and a significant amount of money. His position is much stronger than Gunseng's, but his brother has many loyal troops, who attack quickly. If you don't move to guard your Palace immediately, Gunseng can and will quickly destroy you.

As soon as the mission starts, upgrade all of your structures. Begin building units at your Factory, which is below and to the right of your Palace. Move your large force to protect the Palace; it will be the focus of Gunseng's attacks.

Gunseng's initial attack concentrates on both the area around your Factory and on the Palace. Your Devastators should have no problem fending off the Gunships while your other forces handle the infantry. Adding a few of your own Light Infantry and Flamethrowers to the mix helps. With regard to your Factory, keep producing units, concentrating on the enemy Missile Tanks first. Because you have such a tremendous amount of money, start building in earnest. There are two possible ways to build units.

One way is to build aerial units. Building up a force of Gunships and using them to assault the enemy position works well. The enemy base is in the screen's top right-hand corner. Knowing that, send in an assault team of ten or so Gunships and destroy several vital buildings, leaving you nothing but the mop-up.

Another way is to build an assault force and cross the bridge next to your Factory. Follow the path north through the enemy Turrets and into the heart of their base. Use the Death Hand as a precursor to your attacks. Drop it on the enemy Turrets, then move your troops in to wipe out the enemy. Remember that Gunseng has two Construction Yards. Destroy both to render his base unable to replace structures.The quickest way to take out Gunseng's Construction Yards is with waves of Gunships. Groups of 10 take one out quickly, suffering about 40 percent losses from the surrounding defenses.

Once Gunseng's Construction Yards are down, it's a matter of time before you destroy his final building and unit.

fighting for gunseng

If you side with the rebellious Gunseng, your work's cut out for you. You must establish a base, build up your forces, and take out the Harkonnen Palace near the map's center. Allies reinforce you and deposit money into your coffers regularly. Bulk up quickly to survive.Build up by expanding your base south, toward the bridge below where your forces enter. As soon as possible, move some armored units to guard the bridge. A couple of Flame Turrets and a Gun Turret also make good guards.

Upgrade your structures as soon as you

place them. Doing so costs you, but the benefits are worth the money. Your first group of reinforcements appears to the left of your base. Move them into your base and set them to guard the entrance. Enemy Scouts try to enter your base via this path regularly; by blocking them here, you keep the enemy blind.

The second set of reinforcements brings problems. As the group appears, several things happen. First, a large group of enemy units attacks the reinforcements as they set down. You may lose the entire group, but if you target and destroy the bulk of the enemy Missile Tanks, the loss is worth the benefits to your base.

Second, Copec launches a Death Hand Missile. With luck, he targets your Construction Yard. It survives if you start repairing it immediately.

Focus your attention on the dropzone for the second group of reinforcements. You may lose them all, but make your life easier by taking out all of the Missile Tanks attacking you. Back in your base, build at least two Inkvines and two of your own Missile Tanks, as well as several Assault Tanks and Buzzsaws. Use these to fend off the enemy troops that survive the attack on your reinforcements.

Now, use your Inkvines to knock out the enemy Gun Turrets along the map's southeastern edge. Walk your troops up slowly, using the Inkvines to eliminate the Turrets. Send everything you can from your base to protect the west side of your base. A wall-protected Gun Turret will help dramatically. Use any additional funds you have to build up your base so it can produce Gunships. Create about six of these units.

Have your Gunships follow your troops down the map's eastern side. When your troops are about even with the enemy Palace, stop and move in your Gunships. Send the entire force directly at the Palace, and don't worry about losses. Six Gunships should be enough to destroy the Palace, which is what you need for the victory.

House Ordos
The Beginning

As with the other two Houses, your first mission is simple. You must destroy a small Atreides base in a territory that your predecessor lost. You'll receive enough reinforcements to handle the territory easily, making this battle a good place to get used to Ordos troops and technology.

Essentially, this mission follows the same pattern as the first mission for the other two Houses. An initial rush of enemy troops hits you. Then, a massive group of Sand Bikes attack. You also get a nice view of a worm swallowing a few Atreides units. To help blunt the attacks on your base, add a few Chemical Troopers, a Factory, and approximately six Dust Scouts.

When your second group of reinforcements appears, select them all and send them toward the center of the map to push back approaching Atreides forces.

The best place to meet the Atreides is in the small encampment near the middle of the map. Wait there and arrange your units to take out the Atreides troops. Your Dust Scouts should handle the infantry while your Laser Tanks destroy the Sand Bikes.

Move your troops into position north of the Atreides base, then send the entire force in at once. Shoot barrels to destroy the enemy buildings quickly. Once you've destroyed all of the major structures, the mission ends in success.

On the Heighliner

After your first territory defense, you get an interesting assignment. A Heighliner filled with Atreides and Harkonnen troops is bound for Arrakis. The Executrix wants to test a new weapon: Deviator Gas. Anything that inhales this substance becomes highly susceptible to suggestion and goes into a killing rage. You're to release this gas in the Heighliner's ventilation system. Doing so will violate the Great Convention, but that shouldn't concern you.You start with a nice collection of units, which is good because you won't be getting much help in this mission. You need to move slowly and let your units' ability to self-heal keep them alive. Send one of your Scouts to check out the path ahead of you.Use your units in the following combination to move through this map. Have a Scout check out the area ahead of you. Use an AA Trooper to knock out any barrels from a distance, which takes down some enemy units. Once the barrels are gone, use your Chemical Troopers to eliminate enemy infantry. Do that until you reach the large ramp with branches to the top left and bottom right.

Take out the enemy units on the right. Nothing of value is there, but you can prevent those units from attacking you from behind by eliminating them now. Use your Mortar Infantry to take out the barrels when the guards are near them, and move on quickly.

Next, use Mortar Infantry to take out the enemies at the top of the middle ramp. Once they're dead, send the Mortar up to the top of the ramp and use it to eliminate the Atreides Sniper on the small platform above and to the left. That opens the way through the enemy troops back on the ship's main floor. Use either the Mortar or AA Troopers to knock out the barrels, again taking out as many enemy units as possible with the explosions.

As you move into the next area, you spot another Atreides Sniper on a platform above you. Take him out by targeting the barrels around him. Your AA Troopers should have no problem with this.Once the Sniper is dead, move your force up the ramp and down into the next area. Again, you can choose between going right or left. Both paths lead to the same thing: the ventilation system. The path up and to the left leads through some Atreides units, including a pair of Snipers. The easier way is to the right.

Collect the two Sardaukar units in this area and use them to lead the way to the right. Have them target barrels to eliminate the Harkonnen troops in front of you, then simply follow the path. Move your Engineers behind the Sardaukar and run them into the ventilation system when they get close. The Sardaukar take out anything blocking the path.Once your Engineers reach the ventilation system, the mission ends in success.

Protect the Executrix

After your second defense, it's time to return to Draconis IV (the Ordos homeworld) to review your performance. As you near the planet, you receive a transmission from the Speaker. Tleilaxu bioforms have gone berserk and threaten the Executrix's existence. Move quickly to quell the Tleilaxu attack and save the Ordos ruler.

You only face Tleilaxu units in this mission. That means you need a combination of units to protect yourself. Handle the entire mission with vehicles, using Dust Scouts to fend off Contaminators and Laser Tanks to fight back Leeches. Use Engineers to take care of Leech larvae-infected vehicles.Move your starting force up to the small base and claim the structures with Engineers. Don't worry about repairing the structures. Instead, upgrade both the Factory and the Construction Yard, then start building units. Also, put down a Barracks and upgrade it.

When you're ready for battle, send a group of vehicles toward the closest Outpost. Clear out the Tleilaxu units and set up a perimeter. Then, build a couple of Windtraps and send an Engineer to claim the Outpost. When you take it, you get both it and all of the surrounding defenses. Add a few more Pop-Up and Gas Turrets to the area, particularly on the cliff walls, to fight back the enemy units.From here, build up your forces and continue funneling them to the new front you created. Inch them forward, moving infected units back so the Engineers can repair them. Move in and suppress the Tleilaxu. The easiest way is to have your weaker units sit back and shoot any escaping enemies while your Kobras take down the turrets.What remains is a basic mission that shouldn't be too hard to complete. Because of their range, units such as Kobras are excellent for destroying incoming units. Move a group toward the Ordos Palace. Send a couple of Dust Scouts and Laser Tanks to keep the Kobras safe.Once the turrets are down, eliminate the Flesh Vats, then the Windtraps. The final Tleilaxu unit's destruction signals the mission's end. The Executrix's reaction is about as close to gratitude as you'll ever get from House Ordos.

Black & White

Find all the Creatures and solidify your godhood by Thierry Nguyen

Godhood is a tireless struggle; hence this installment of BLACK & WHITE hints is coming a month later than anticipated. Because the later lands are more plot-driven, there are less optional quests this time around. In addition to the side quest solutions, I've included some quick'n'dirty hints for getting through the main quest in each land. Finally, there's a guide to snagging all the Creatures.

Land Three

The Guru's Stroll

After establishing your initial village, and as you start working on the next village, you can trigger this annoying, yet extremely useful subquest.

What you have to do here is follow the Guru without him knowing it. This requires a delicate balance of staying far enough from him so that he doesn't see you, yet being close enough so that he doesn't elude you. As you successfully wind down the mountain with him, there will be save points along the way.

I found the keyboard and mouse to be the best combo for navigating the mountain with the Guru. What helps is to have a mouse with a scroll-wheel that acts as a third mouse-button. Use the arrow keys to move down the mountain, and use the scroll-wheel to both orient yourself and keep the Guru in view. Tapping the arrow keys usually gives a burst of movement that seems "just right" when following him. The Guru will frequently stop to look about, and using the mouse-button to swivel around gives the precision needed for this quest. Also, press "S" to get villager stats, and you'll see him marked as an "Actor." This helps because whenever he goes underneath a large rock, you'll see the sign before he comes out, allowing you to orient yourself before he emerges and possibly spots you.

The trickiest parts you need to watch out for are the mushroom patches near the edge of the path. The Guru tends to go to a mushroom patch and survey the land before moving on. This means that he'll even look at where he was walking before. He tends to look back and forth about two or three times, so just get ready to swing around

One beneficial bug in the pre-patched version: Rapidly right-clicking the Wood Miracle on the workshop produces an enormous amount of free wood for your people to build things with.

Creature swapping is an inexact science, as some are puzzle rewards while others require external files to unlock. As of press time, some of the Creatures are unlockable due to either bugs in the quests, or unavailability of the official "unlocking" patch file. There are user-made utilities that can help in finding Creatures (*cough*Titan Editor*cough*), but those are recommended only for people who know what risks they're taking. All of my Creatures think "evil" is chic, and hence sport the dark, smoky, fire-and-brimstone look.

Ape

One of the starter animals. It's smart, but not the greatest fighter.

Brown Bear

Quest reward in Land Five. The Bear has very good all-around stats, especially in terms of physical toughness and decent learning ability.

Cow

Starter-animal as well. Physical stats aren't very hot, but it's a decent learner. Not as smart as an ape, nor as physical as the tiger. Then again, it's tougher than the ape, and smarter than the tiger.

When focusing on large tasks such as building Wonders, hit "Alt-2" to accelerate time.

when you see him walking towards a mushroom patch.

Again, it's worth it to follow him, as Lethys will throw a couple of obstacles at you as you progress in this land, and the Guru will help you with said obstacles.

The Rejuvenator

Converting the third village snags you the only other silver scroll in the land. It's not even a challenge per se, it's more like a helpful perk. What you get here is a combination fountain of youth and possibly a new Creature.

All you have to do is drop an old villager in front of the hut. The woman there will do her thing, and bada-bing! you have yourself a kid. Evil gods can use this to de-age a villager to a more profitable child before sacrificing him or her.

For changing the Creature, give the woman a kid instead of a senior citizen. Her spell will screw up, and you'll get either a Land-One Ape, or if you're lucky, a Chimp to replace your current Creature.

Annoying Invincible Guy

Near your first village is an incredibly annoying little Celtic guy sitting alone by a campfire. You won't miss him, as he'll start taunting you whenever you get near. If you still can't spot him, press "S", as he shows up as the only other actor on the island (besides the Guru).

Don't ask me why, but this guy is invincible. You can throw him around, light him on fire, dunk him in water, feed him to your Creature, whatever you want. He'll still pop out all whiny and taunting. Stranger yet, the immediate area surrounding him is considered to be under your influence. One thing to try is to throw him to an area outside of your influence, and while he's running back, take advantage of your limited area of control. One thing I did frequently was "leap-frog" his influence, in that I would repeatedly grab him as he ran away, and deposit him a few feet back, in order to keep him in one general area and give me the ability to use a Gesture for a miracle or two.

Tree Puzzle

Same one as in Land Two, except there are three kinds of trees instead of two. It's between the Guru's temple and the Annoying Invincible Guy. Again, you'll get a Flying Creatures Miracle as a reward, which will help a long way towards converting Lethys' villages.

Land Three Hints

This is all about conversion. As your influence spreads, you should do things like tossing villagers around, creating fires and then dousing them, or adding food and wood to the Village Store. The last two villages are the hardest, as they are under Lethys' control, and hence need 1500 belief as opposed to around 500 belief to convert.

You can also follow a scorched earth policy, and simply destroy every other village. I recommend keeping at least the second village. It's situated in a good spot from which to launch fireballs at the other towns. Just sacrifice children over and other, and if you have the patience, you can burn it all down.

Land Four

The Fish Puzzle

Once things have settled down a bit in Land Four, look for some pylons floating in the water in a circular formation. Here, a fisherman will ask you to snag some fish for him. All you have to do is tap the water near the fish to get them moving. So, just keep on tapping the water in various directions around the groups of fish, until you eventually shepherd them into the circle.

You'll get the snazzy turtle as a reward for your godly fish-herding.

Leading the Blind

Here, you're guiding a blind woman back to her brother. This is mostly a matter of seeing what's up ahead, and preparing for it appropriately. Try flagging the woman with a bookmark, since it's easier to see a moving number rather than to constantly zoom in and out to keep track of her with your own eyes.

The first obstacle is a pack of wolves. Just scout out for them, and get rid of them

Gorilla

You need a file to unlock this one via the [illegible] that the [illegible] and it s[illegible]

Horse

Requires a file to show up at the Creature Breeder as well. Reasonably smart, and decent physical stats. A good all-around Creature

Leopard

Fastest feline-based Creature. It may be dumb, but it can deliver the hurt, and has the best reflexes of any Creature in the game. Requires a file to unlock

(tossing them around, or using painful miracles) before she comes around. If you were able to grab the incoming wolves in the previous land, this should be no problem.

After getting rid of the wolves, prepare to conjure up a water miracle. That path of trees up ahead? Fire. Her mortal shell can't take the fire, so douse them as they erupt. Or, try tossing the trees out before they catch fire in the first place.

Finally, there's an ogre. Maybe you were lucky and you were able to defeat him in combat before doing this quest. Otherwise, find the nearby sheep, and toss them away. Their constant bleating wakes him up, allowing him to see and then attack the woman. If the sheep aren't around, he'll keep on sleeping. I prefer to beat him up beforehand.

But you'll want to wait for the patch to fix this quest. Otherwise, all of this is for naught, as the game will default to failure. A pity, because the reward is getting the snazzy Wolf Creature that Lethys had earlier.

Creature Breeder

Same place as he was back in Land One.

Thomas or Thesius

This is a simplified version of the famous Thesius and the Minotaur Maze; simplified in that the maze is a lot smaller than the original puzzle. Like Thesius, Thomas moves one step at a time, while the wolf speeds towards Thomas at a pace of two squares at a time. Once you navigate both mazes, you'll get a Creature Strength Miracle Dispenser.

Land Four Hints

Beat up the Ogre first, as that's easy to do right away, and will stop the lightning from zapping your villages. Then go for the Bell Puzzle (a.k.a. Black & White's version of Simon Says) to stop all the fireballs from raining down; if it's too hard to repeat the sequences, here they are (press "Z" for default camera view, and read each pillar from left to right). Round one: 1, 2, 3. Round two: 1, 2, 3, 5, 2. Round three: 1, 2, 3, 5, 2, 3, 1. And final round: 1, 2, 3, 5, 2, 3, 1, 4, 1.

As for the last Guardian Stone, you'll need to convert the Aztec village to your belief. Then, either have your Creature bring the woman, Keiko, back to Adam; or kill Keiko.

Finally, for the Cursed Undead Village, make an all-new village near it. Once you have a new village center, you'll then have enough influence to convert the Undead Village. Convert it, and then have your Creature raise one buried totem while you raise the other. Then, get ready for a godly showdown.

Land Five

Explorers Return

Did you help the guys with their boat way back in Land One? Or did you simply ignore, or even get rid of them altogether? Well, you might regret not helping them then, as they make another appearance here. They give you both a new Creature (Polar Bear) and an additional village. Use this village for labor, farming, or sacrificial breeding ground. Whatever you want.

Wolfing It Down

Instead of helping someone get away from a hungry predator, you're helping a predator snag some food. Orient the maze so that your wolf buddy is on the right side, and the sign post that describes the dilemma is at the bottom. Then, ring the bells in this order: Bottom, Right, Top, Left, Top, Left, Bottom, and Right. You'll unlock one of the better Creatures, the Lion, as a result.

Note that bookmarks not only take you to the marked location, but they also record the exact camera angle. So, get a good view of where you want the mark to go, and then create it—such as an angle that lets you see desire flags easily, or a good overview of your village.

Puff the Magic Dragon

Convert the Tibetan village, and you'll get this scroll. You can try to trigger this quest before converting the village, but since you won't have influence, you'll just be a big bag of ineffectual godhood.

You'll be helping some hunters take down a dragon. Use either a one-shot, or a temple-based Heal Miracle to patch the hunters up. Then, use a Fireball Miracle (again, either find a one-shot, or gesture it up yourself) to light the pyre near the mine entrance. Make sure to ignite only the pyre, and not the fellow hunters themselves.

Listen to the hunters run around and kill

Lion

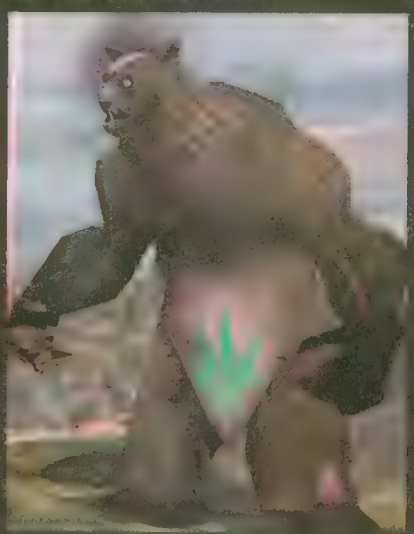
Great all-around Creature. Both smart and tough. Reward for a puzzle in Land Five

Mandrill

Another Creature collected at the Creature Breeder after using an unlocking file. Very much like other primates, in that it's smart but not very tough. The weirdest-looking primate by far.

Polar Bear

Similar to the Brown Bear stat-wise; color-scheme is the only real difference. You'll need to have helped the Explorers in Land One, so that they can show up in Land Five with this Creature.



the dragon, and they'll soon emerge with a Winged Creature Miracle Dispenser, making future conversion oh-so-easy.

Pooper Scooper

Convert the Japanese village, and you'll get this quest. Just scour the forest looking for poo, and toss it into the water (it's apparently more okay to possibly contaminate the water rather than to let it lie around the forest). Your reward for being a Mighty Poop Scoop is yet another Creature: the Brown Bear.

Land Five Hints

The main hint here is to follow the order of Wonder destruction. Your informant in the Japanese village points out specific Wonders having specific side-effects on your Creature, and if you were too trigger-happy and you went ahead and destroyed the Wonders out of order, it might have screwed up your Creature (this is supposed to be fixed in the patch). For now, to be safe, wait until the informant tells you about the Wonder before you go about destroying it.

I'll leave it up to you as to how to fight Nemesis, and your final choice for the game.

Tortoise

Reward for the Fish Puzzle in Land Four. Very smart, and very tough, but has the slowest reflexes of any Creature. It only wins battles because it can take all the punishment while slowly winding up for the hit.

Wolf

Very cool Creature, similar to the Lion Reasonably-bright, quite tough and fast, and looks very vicious (or noble, depending on alignment). It's a quest-reward, and until a patch fixes the quest, you might want to either wait it out, or use a third-party utility to snag the Wolf

Zebra

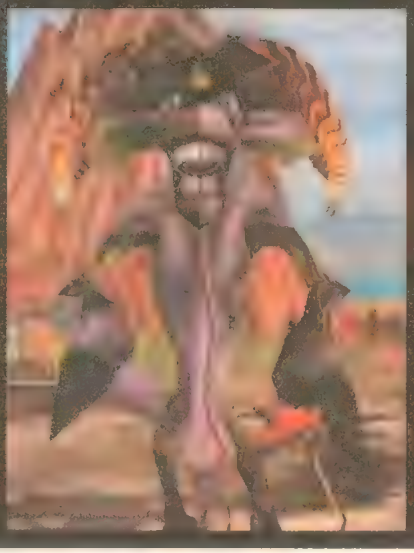
Quest reward in Land Two. Similar to the Horse stat-wise, but with a wacky-looking color scheme

Rhino

Most likely needs a file-unlock, as it's not a quest reward. This is a great bruiser-Creature. It's one of the toughest—and dumbest. If you want a Creature that runs around, picks fights, and smashes villages into pieces, go for this one.

Sheep

By far the most bizarre looking of the Creatures. Find all of the lost sheep way back in Land One. The Sheep has average intelligence and unremarkable physical stats. Use it if you want to weird people out with its funky look



Tiger

Starter-animal, for the bruiser god. Not very smart, but very fast and tough. Prone to eating people on its own

Summoner

Sharpen your summoning in Lenele by Elliott Chin

SUMMONER is one of those RPGs that can accurately be described as gargantuan. I couldn't cram an entire walkthrough into these pages, but I managed to grab all the information on quests for the first main section of the game, Lenele. So while this guide won't get you through the entire game, it will take you from the beginning in Masad to finding Yago. It also includes a complete rundown of the side quests you'll find in Lenele. Some of the quests originating in Lenele take you to other parts of Medeva, and I'll touch a little on those areas as well.

Before you can leave Masad, you have to battle this brute. Use chain combos to keep him off balance, or he'll knock you down with his hammer and flatten you.

Masad

To get out of Masad, follow the cobblestone road up the hill. After you get up the hill and into the main town, you'll see that road turns left, while a dirt road continues straight. The cobblestone road dead-ends after that left turn, so take the dirt road instead; it'll take you out of town. After it slopes downward, it'll fork left and continue straight. Continue straight. At the end of the road you'll find an abandoned house. Behind it is a chest, inside of which are cloth gloves that give you a +5 to defense. Gloves in hand, go back and take the left fork. At the bottom of the road you'll find Nath, who gives you your main quest: to find Yago. Be sure to save your game here before crossing the bridge and fighting the hammer-wielding giant. After killing him, you can leave Masad and travel across the overland map to Lenele.

Quests in Masad

Aesik's Sword: You'll find Aesik crawling around the bottom of the cobblestone road. With his dying breath, he'll give you his sword and ask you to give it to his son, Earis, who's a guard in Lenele.

Find Yago: When you reach the bridge out of Masad, you'll find the villager Nath, who tells you to find Yago, who lives in Lenele. This is your main quest.

The Main Quest

Your main quest is to find Yago and gather the four rings of summoning. He's in the palace in Lenele. Once you enter the Lenele Outskirts, go to the Marketplace, follow the main road to the Crown District, and then to Temple District. Once there, take a left and follow the hallway to the plaza entrance. After the cut-scene, Flece the thief will join you, and you'll have a party of two. You'll then be in front of the Lenele sewers. You're led to believe that you should go through the sewers from there and find the underground entrance to the palace sewers. Instead, leave the sewers and travel above ground back to the Old City. Go to the sewer grate in the Old City and have Flece pick the lock. Then enter the sewers through the sewer grate. This is in fact the back door; entering this way means you won't get lost in the sewers. When you reach the control room with the three golems, ask the golem farthest from you to open gate C3. That opens the gate on your right, which is the entrance to the palace aqueduct. Once inside the aqueduct, you need to fight three golems. While battling them, two giant tentacles from the sewer will continually batter you. If you complete a bunch of the side quests before coming here, and are level 8 or higher, you should have no problem. After this fight, you'll be able to walk into the basement of the palace.

The Palace

Once you're in the basement, there's only one stairway leading up to the palace. If a guard spots you, you'll have to start over at the basement. Yago is on the very top floor of the palace, so you'll need to climb up three levels from the basement. Rotate the camera often to make sure the coast is clear before walking along the hallway. When you see a guard, duck into a room and close the door behind you. If the door is open, the guard will spot you. However, because the guard can't catch you unless he actually sees you, you can escape detection by walking directly behind a guard. On the top floor of the palace are your two objectives: Yago and Drego's gem. Finding both shouldn't be too hard. When you get to the top floor, you'll be in a large room with one door leading out. There are two guards whose patrols take them near the door, so don't exit until they are both out of sight. Leave the room and take a left, followed by another left. Take a right, and you'll see an important cut-scene; afterward, enter the room and pick up Yago's key. Then exit and get back into the hallway. Take it until it ends and then take the door on the right. Go inside the L-shaped room and you will find Prince Yon's amulet. Go back to where you took a right to watch the cut-scene, and now go left instead. The hallway will turn left. The first door on your right is Yago's room. Enter it and you'll have completed your first main quest. Flece will get 650 xp and the sneak skill. Joseph will get the summon skill and the ring of darkness. After that, it's off to Iona for the ring of light, and your fight to save all of Medeva.

You'll need to fight these golems en route to the palace. Have lots of health potions ready. The golems aren't too tough, but two tentacles overhead keep battering you, hindering your ability to cast spells.

Lenele Outskirts

When you enter Lenele, you'll be in the Outskirts zone. Follow the road and you'll come to a the Lenele Marketplace door. You'll find a potion and an arms merchant, as well as a free fiery falchion (see Crazy Iven entry "Quests and NPCs in Lenele Outskirts"). The Great Ragneli and a potion merchant are on your right. To the far left is the Lenele harbor district and docks. If you walk along the wall left of the door, you'll find the merchant Beelon. In front of him is a mad man named Crazy Iven. Walk to the edge of the harbor district and you will find the master thief Drego (he appears only after Flece joins your party). The arms merchant is also here. (Don't buy any weapons; you'll find a better free one soon.) Behind him in a crate is an icicle rune.

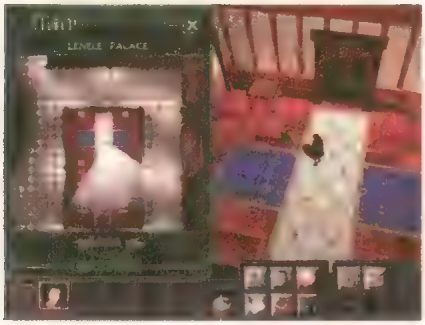
Quests and NPCs in Lenele Outskirts

Durgan's Lucky Charm: Once you

enter Lenele Outskirts, walk straight until you see a stairway on your right descending to a docked ship. Go down it and talk to Durgan, who tells you he's missing his lucky charm. If you find it, he will reward you. This quest is very involved. You have to first go to the Old City zone and talk to Ivas the Gambler. Do that, and snag 100 xp. Then you must talk to Gebbin the Pawnbroker (you'll earn 100 xp), who tells you to talk to Agilo the Merchant (200 xp), who stands in the Avrum Market in the Lenele Marketplace zone. Then you must talk to Agilo's mistress, Dama (300 xp), who wanders around Burcan's Island (which is in the same zone but across the bridge from Avrum market). She tells you to talk to Torras the Jeweler (400 xp), who is in the Crown District, standing beside the actors' outdoor stage. Torras tells you to talk to Humbus the Ratcatcher (500 xp), who is also in the Crown District, to the right of the entrance to the Temple District. In total, this quest can earn you 1,700 xp (but no gold). To complete it, you'll need to travel to Orenia, which you do in the second half of the game.

Ragneli's Robbers: The Great Ragneli is the merchant who is on your right as you face the door to the Lenele Marketplace zone. He asks you to find the bandit Zane, who has been robbing his trade wagons; kill Zane and bring back his bow as proof. Zane and his bandits roam the grasslands around Lenele. To complete the quest, just wander around on the overland map surrounding Lenele. Eventually, one of your random encounters will be with Zane. However, Zane isn't the villain. Just ask him for the bow and he will give it to you if you promise to leave him alone. When you bring the bow back to Ragneli, the cheapskate will reward you with a piddly 10 gp. You do get 500 xp, though.

Seeds of Aahur: You get this quest from Beelon, who stands against the wall to the left of the door into Lenele Marketplace. He asks you to take a bag of seeds to a Khosani merchant named Elarh in the Khosani city of Saanavarh. It will be a while before you can complete this quest. Although Beelon says the reward for this is 2,000 gp, the Khosani merchant will pay you only 1,000 gp, so don't try to haggle more out of him.



You need the key to Yago's room before you can see him. Once you get to the top floor, go left, then left again. At the intersection of hallways, go right, and after watching the cut-scene, grab this key.

Crazy Iven: This mumbling idiot lies to the left of the door into the Lenele Marketplace. If you read between the lines, he tells you there is treasure in the "big delicious." Near Iven you'll see three hanging fish. Go to the largest one, which looks like a man-size tuna, and click on it. You'll get a fiery falchion.

Amulet of Prince Yon: Once Flece joins your party and you sneak into the palace, you'll control Flece, who has a quest she must complete for Drego. You must find the amulet of Prince Yon (see "The Palace"). Once you have the amulet, return to the Lenele Outskirts and go to the harbor district (if you are entering the Outskirts from the Marketplace, just go left until you can't go any farther). Drego is waiting there, close to the arms merchant. When you give him the gem, he gives you 2,000 gp and you get 200 xp.

Lenele Crown District

You can enter the Crown District from two locations in the Marketplace. You'll find the first set of entrances right after you go through the door from Lenele Outskirts, to the right of Avrum Market. The second set of entrances is in Burcan's Island—follow the main road in the Lenele Marketplace across the bridge and keep following it as it turns right. Directions to individuals in this section are from either the Burcan's Island entrance or the Avrum Market entrance, as detailed in each entry.

Quests and NPCs in Crown District

Pomporo's Heirloom: If you take a right after entering the Crown District from Burcan's Island and walk along the wide street between the two rows of buildings, you will find Pomporo at the end of the street. He tells you that his family heirloom, a valuable signet ring, has been stolen. He asks you to find it. You can ask his wife and chambermaid (both are standing around the same building), but you don't have to. When you enter the Lenele Sewers, explore and you will find the signet ring. Bring it back to Pomporo for a reward.

Zefnat the Scholar: Zefnat is sandwiched between two buildings, standing at the edge of the river. You'll find him by following the same route you use to get to Pomporo. However, as you are walking down the wide street you will see a ramp on your left, just after a well. Go up the ramp, pass the jewelry merchant, and then go right. Zefnat is standing here, looking over the river. He will ask you to help him find two manuscripts to complete his scholarly research. The two objects he needs are called Volume 28 and Volume 67. Volume 28 is in the Lenele Marketplace, held by the bookseller Bribus. (See "Lenele Marketplace" for directions to Bribus.) Bribus won't sell you the volume if

Lenele Marketplace

The Lenele Marketplace is huge. It's divided into two areas, a bustling market of stalls called Avrum Market just as you enter the zone, and a quieter district of buildings called Burcan's Island, which is behind Avrum's Market across a bridge. As long as you follow the main road or keep it in your sights, you won't get lost. If you leave the main road and go left after entering Avrum's Market, you'll find an entrance to the Old City zone. Going off the main road and walking right will take you to the entrance to the Crown District zone. If you follow the main road straight, it turns left and then turns right again, where it crosses a bridge. You'll find Jekhar waiting for you here, just before the bridge, when you first enter Lenele. He tells you to find Yago at the Lenele Palace. Once the road crosses the bridge, it widens and turns right. To the left of the bridge is another entrance to the Old City, and following the main road right takes you to two more entrances to the Crown District.

Quests and NPCs in Lenele Marketplace

Agilo the Merchant: Agilo can be found in Avrum's Market. If you enter the Lenele Marketplace from the Outskirts, just walk straight and you will find Agilo standing near the main road. You must talk to him to solve the Durgan's Lucky Charm quest.

Aesik's Sword: You acquire this quest in Masad (from the wounded Aesik at the foot of the cobblestone road), but complete it here. You'll find Aesik's son Earis standing guard to the right of the bridge on the main road. Give him Aesik's sword, and you'll get 100 xp and Earis will give you his bastard sword.

The Sword of Jarl : After you cross the bridge and continue right on the main road, you'll find the smith, Jarl, on the right side of the road. He asks you to help him collect payment from a nobleman named Lord Korel, who picked up a sword from Jarl but never paid for it. Jarl says Korel hunts around the grasslands surrounding Lenele. To complete the quest, wander around the overland map near Lenele. After a while, you will encounter Lord Korel. He will refuse to pay you, so you'll have to kill him and collect the sword. When you return to Jarl, you will get 500 xp and Jarl will give you a Medevan hatchet, a powerful axe weapon.

Cerval's Game: After crossing the bridge and following the main road right, you'll find Mercer the Tailor

continued on page 122

you tell him it is for Zefnat. Tell him it isn't, and pay him 250 gp. He'll give you the book. To get Volume 67, you need to travel to the island monastery of Iona. In the public library in Iona, you'll find Volume 67 on a bookshelf. Once you get it, return to Zefnat and you'll get 750 xp and he'll give you a garnet.

Torras the Jeweler: Torras is part of the Durgan's Lucky Charm Quest. He can be found standing near the outdoor stage. It is easier to get to Torras if you enter the Crown District from Avrum's Market in the Lenele Marketplace. Cross into the Crown District and follow the road straight up toward the palace. When you see the stage on your right, you'll see a merchant talking to a noble. The merchant is Torras.

Old City

The Old City is an important place for side quests and NPCs. Tancred, Flece's adoptive father, lives here. The Apothecary, who provides a map later on to Ikaemos Swamp, is also here. You can enter the Old City from Avrum Market or Burcan's Island (refer to the Lenele Marketplace for information on these two locations). If you need gold, come here and undertake the Infestation quest from Morden. He is a constant source of gold that won't dry up for the entire first half of the game. To find the keep in the Old City, enter from Burcan's Island and go right from the Apothecary. To get to Tancred's hideout, enter from Burcan's Island but go straight down the narrow alley and turn right. Follow the street until it ends.

Quests and NPCs in Old City

Free Jinyan: To get this quest, enter from the first entrance on the left in Avrum Market. You'll enter into a street. Just walk straight down, past the armorer, until you get to a burned building on your left. Inside the rubble is Aravind. He tells you that his Orenian friend, Jinyan, has been unlawfully imprisoned. He'd like your help in finding out where he is. After you get the quest, go to the keep and talk to Gorbus the Guard and then return to Aravind. When you tell Aravind that Jinyan is in the keep, you'll get 50 xp and 50 gp. Then find Dagis the Forger and buy a forged release order from him. Return to Gorbus with the order. Gorbus will spot it as a fake, so bribe him with 20 gp. Then return to Aravind. Tell Aravind you didn't go anything illegal and he will thank you and give you 100 gp. You'll also get 100 xp. If you tell him you had to forge a document, you'll get a smaller reward.

The Beggar's Eye: You get this quest from the Beggar With No Eyes, who sits on the floor close to the well where the rag doll fell (see below). He is blind because the Apothecary stole his eyes; he asks you retrieve them. You do so by going to the Apothecary and completing the Salamanka Tongue quest for him. After you do that, bring the eyes back to the Beggar. He gives you a blessed tunic as reward and you get 200 xp and a blessed surcoat.

The Salamanka Tongue: You get this quest from the Apothecary after talking to the Beggar With No Eyes. The Apothecary will give you the Beggar's eyes, but only if you can get him a Salamanka tongue. Salamankas are fire-breathing lizards that live in the hills west of Lenele. To find one, just wander around in the west hills until you encounter a salamanka. You'll need some fire protection and must be at least level 5 or so before you can tackle it. If you are alone, bring lots of healing potions. Kill the salamanka and bring its tongue back to the Apothecary.

The Infestation: On your way to Pedrog, keep scanning the walls on your left. Eventually, you will see a sewer grate and an unkempt man named Morden next to it. Talk to him and he gives you the infestation quest. He will give you 50 gp for every bacite tail you bring to him. The sewers are infested with bacites, so anytime you need gold, enter the sewer, kill some bacites, and come back to Morden for gold.

The Rag Doll: You get this quest from the Weeping Butcher. To get to him, enter from the first Avrum Market entrance and then go down the street, take a right, and then a left. Follow the street until you hit a well. The Weeping Butcher tells you his daughter dropped her rag doll in the well, and now will die from grief. You can find the doll in the Lenele Sewers. Bring it back for a reward.

Shards of the Ghimaadi: Enter from Burcan's Island and walk straight and you'll find Varyssa, who tells you to bring her three shards for a special reward. You will find two of the shards in the city of Lenele: The green shard is in the Lenele Sewers, and the blue shard is in the Temple of Urath. As you enter the temple, go left and walk through the hallways. When you reach the double stairs, you'll find the chest with the blue shard tucked beside a staircase. The third shard is in the dungeon below Iona.

Dagis the Forger: Dagis is essential to solving the Free Jinyan quest. You'll find him by taking the route to Tancred. Along the way, you'll see an important thief (you'll recognize him by the double exclamation points). That's Dagis.

Salt Smugglers: You get the Salt Smugglers quest after talking to Pedrog. Pedrog is past the keep. As you enter from Burcan's Island, go right, continue under the bridge, and keep going until the road ends. Pedrog is skulking in the shadows. He tells you to find out where some smugglers are hiding their salt shipments. You'll find the salt and the smugglers in the sewers just below the Old City. Enter the sewers through the Old City sewer grate and take a left. Immediately, you'll see crates. There is a chunk of salt on the ground. Pick it up and bring it back to Pedrog for your reward.

Ivas the Gambler: You need Ivas to solve the Durgan's Lucky Charm quest. You'll find him on the way to Pedrog, just after the underpass.

continued from page 121

standing on the left side of the road. He tells you that a thief named Cerval paid him in fake gold for some silk garments. He will be ruined if he doesn't recover the them. He asks you to catch Cerval and return his stolen silk garments. You can find Cerval in the Lenele Sewers, just under the sewer grate in the Old City. To get there, go into the Old City and enter through the Sewer Grate. Kill Cerval and recover the silk garments. When you return to Mercer, he gives you 500 xp and silk breeches, modest armor for your legs.

Bribus the Bookseller: Continue straight after crossing the bridge, and on your left you will find the bookseller Bribus. He is vital to solving Zefnat the Scholar's quest. You will find Zefnat and his quest in the Lenele Crown District.

Midwife Dama: You must talk with Dama to solve the Durgan's Lucky Charm quest. She is on Burcan's Island, and wanders around the main road between Mercer the Tailor and Jarl the Smith.

Madog the Beggar: Madog the Beggar sits on the floor next to the entrance to the Crown District. Follow the main road into Avrum's Market and continue straight along the road. Before you get to the entrance to the Crown District, go left, and you'll find Madog sitting by a tree. Madog is vital for solving the Elodach quest, which you get from the Temple of Urath zone.

Krys the Lanternmaker: Once you cross the main bridge, the road turns right and ends at a bridge to the Crown District. If you take a left just before the road ends, you will find Krys the Lanternmaker only a few steps down the street. He is important for some quests.

To solve both the Ragneli's Robbers and Sword of Jarl quests, you'll need to wander here in the wilderness until you encounter the antagonists of both quests.

PATCHES

Black & White:

This is the big one. It fixes things ranging from the unremovable curse in Land Five to the Blind Woman quest in Land Four. It also adds the ability to skip the beginning tutorial and get you right into the guts of the game: creature development. You need this patch if you're playing this game.

Echelon:

Having problems with an Instant Action mission? Try this patch. This is also for you if you're attempting to run this game on a Pentium or a K6.

Red Alert 1.0006:

The main new feature is support for NAT and Firewalls, letting even more gamers on unusual network setups get some good old-fashioned RA action online. The patch also fixes bugs related to using Tanyas, makes sure modified maps aren't transferred over Internet games, and fixes troubles with the Chrono IFVs.

Serious Sam 1.02:

There's a lot that gets fixed with this new patch. Much of it is technical and network related, so if you play plenty of multiplayer, you'll definitely want to snag this—especially since all players in a game will need to be using the same version. Many of the changes affect mod development, so you amateur designers using the Serious engine will also want this patch.

Summoner 1.30:

There are a lot of multiplayer tweaks here, mostly to make chained attacks more accurate and monsters actually hit back, and to prevent sudden crashes in multiplayer. Weapon animations, level-up fixes, and mouse issues have also been addressed. Again, it's mostly multiplayer fixes, but there's enough here for even the casual SUMMONER player to want to snag this patch.

EASTER EGGS

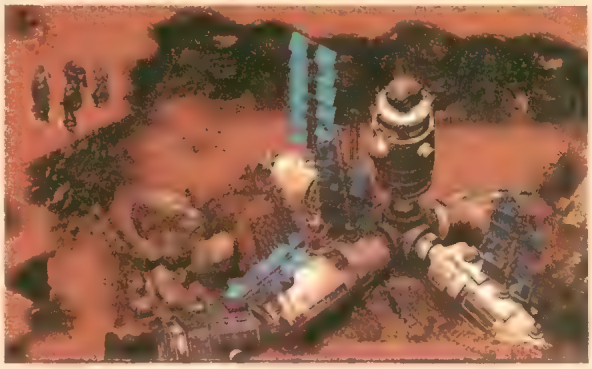
DVD: Requiem For A Dream

Independent studio Artisan Home Entertainment has hidden some interesting bonus material on its release of the acclaimed movie *Requiem for a Dream*.

Boot up the DVD in your player and wait for the main menu of the disc to come up. Then press the down arrow key on your remote control until the line "Hear Tappy's Amazing Life Story" appears at the bottom of the screen.

Now press Enter on the remote control, and you will get to see the full footage from the movie's television program, Tappy Tibbons, which Sara Goldfarb watches while on her drug of choice. It's an exciting five-minute feature that includes Tappy talking about his amazing life story.

Game: Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood Of Steel



Wander around, and you might just come across the Mir Space Station.

Per the FALLOUT tradition, there are numerous easter eggs scattered around FALLOUT TACTICS. Your chance of finding said easter eggs depends on factors such as Outdoorsman skill, your Luck stat, and whether or not you have perks such as Explorer or Ranger. Easter eggs tend to appear in a few specific squares, such as a couple of squares south of Peoria, or a few squares west and south of Macomb.

Try to have a character specialize in easter egg hunting by reading Scout books and selecting World Map–focused perks. Then just roam around the wasteland, hanging around the bunkers and the cities until you find an easter egg.

This is just a partial listing of the easter eggs in FALLOUT TACTICS:

Brothers Grimm: Two supermutants in a small area; one is wounded. Heal the wounded one, and they will become recruitable soldiers. Note that they're both Paladin Commanders (rank 11), so it might take a while before you can actually recruit them. One's a melee specialist while the other is a big guns/energy weapons guy.

Bazaar Day: A reference to DIABLO and EVERQUEST. A group of shopkeepers who shout the same acronym-laced spammy drivel found in such online RPGs. The only truly useful item for sale here is Ghoul Armor, for any ghoul soldiers you recruit for your squad. The Devilthorn Coat has some really nice stats, but it's just a throwaway reference to DIABLO, as you can't possibly equip it (it requires a strength of 75).

L33Tists: Two fellas named Ph4tman and L33tleboy. They claim to 0wn j00, but they're just fools with no worthy loot on 'em.

Canadian Invasion: Looks like the *CGW* Canadian Corner thrives in the FALLOUT wasteland. A group of tribals re-enact the Canadian Invasion. Since they're tribals, you should easily beat them. The one interesting piece of loot is the Super Soaker, which uses acid for ammo.

Gas Station: Old woman at an abandoned gas station. Not particularly funny, but she does sell an Elixir of Vitality, which permanently raises an Endurance stat by one point.

PIP Boy: PIP Boy himself appears as a recruitable soldier. If you have a full squad, he'll just wander around and say random things. If you have only five recruits, PIP Boy will join the Recruits pool. He's a great little gunner, as he has all the gun skills tagged, and while his stats are just decent, he has an amazing 10 Luck. Combine that with his gun skills, and you've got frequent critical hits.

Send us your tips

Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to cgw_letters@ziffdavis.com (please put cgtips in the subject line). We'll publish three submissions each month. Please send genuine tips or strategies instead of cheat codes cut-and-pasted from the Internet. One winner will get something pulled at random from the *Computer Gaming World* BozoBin®!

CHEATS

Action: Half-Life Blue-Shift

Enable Console

Enable the console by opening BLUE SHIFT's properties (right-click the shortcut and select Properties) and editing the target line as follows:
"bshift.exe -dev -console"

You can now bring up the console using the tilde key (~). When you're in the game, type: **sv_cheats 1**

You may now enter the following cheats:

god	God Mode
noclip	Fly through walls
impulse 101	Gives all weapons
sv_gravity #	Adjusts gravity (# = 800 for default gravity, # = 0 for zero gravity)
map #	Replace # with map name: ba_canal1 ba_canal1b ba_canal2 ba_canal3 ba_elevator ba_hazard1 ba_hazard2 ba_hazard3 ba_hazard4 ba_hazard5 ba_hazard6 ba_maint ba_outro ba_power1 ba_power2 ba_security1 ba_security2 ba_teleport1 ba_teleport2 ba_tram1 ba_tram2 ba_tram3 ba_xen1 ba_xen2 ba_xen3 ba_xen4 ba_xen5 ba_xen6 ba_yard1 ba_yard2 ba_yard3 ba_yard3a ba_yard3b ba_yard4 ba_yard4a ba_yard5 ba_yard5a

DIRTY TRICKS OF THE MONTH

Amidst all the tips for COUNTER-STRIKE (look for those next month, in addition to our COUNTER-STRIKE etiquette article), there were a few gems for other games. This month, the prize goes to an absolutely evil way to kill people in EVERQUEST. Next month's prize is this month's spotlight review: EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE.

Here is a devious strategy to use on a PVP server in EVERQUEST. You need a spell-caster class that gets the spells Enduring Breath and Root (or their equivalent). Go to an area with a deep pool, river, lake, or the like (that doesn't have monsters in it that attack you) and cast the Enduring Breath on yourself. Walk under the water just deep enough so that you're not visible from above the water, and wait. Change your view from first-person to an outside camera view, and pan it around above the water so that you can see the shore, dock, or whatever is there. When another player comes by, select him/her and then move deeper into the water (to cover, hopefully, your spell-casting pyrotechnics). Try to Root the victim to stop him or her, and begin casting whatever damage spells you can. The best target is a fighter-type class. S/he shouldn't even be able to target you if s/he has a bow, plus s/he can't escape via Gate or a similar spell (unless s/he happens to have a potion of Gate). If s/he breaks the Root and you can't get it back on, just keep throwing damage spells on him/her. His or her health should be reduced enough so that if your mana is depleted, you can melee the fool to finish him or her off (if you have at least moderate melee skills, and especially if your level is higher than your target's). A similar strategy can be employed if you can find a hiding spot in a town or other area (such as an empty house). Here, the Enduring Breath part is not used, but the other tactics will work. Basically, get a target, hide somewhere, and cast damage spells while the target is guessing where you are. By the time s/he figures out what's going on, s/he's just about D.O.A. Also, one way to get a target is to drop something worthless in a spot where you can target someone; when they come over to pick it up, you target them. This strategy doesn't work on monsters because the game "knows" where you are and will have them run or swim directly to you.
—James Shelnutt

Wow, how predatory and devious, James. You get the Sid Meier classic ALPHA CENTAURI. You want to fight for spice? Send us some good Dirty Tricks!

Unreal Tournament

While playing UNREAL TOURNAMENT online the other day, I noticed that if people don't have a good weapon, many times they will try to get some kills off by using weak guns like enforcers, while totally ignoring the ammo for other guns that are lying on the ground during a heated firefight. This usually won't get you anywhere unless your opponents really suck, so instead of trying to use a bad weapon or camping to wait for a good weapon to appear, try shooting the ammo of any weapon lying on the ground. I've managed to get a couple of ultra and monster kills by doing this, and I find that shooting the ammo itself sends out one heck of an explosion. It's especially effective when the other team charges at you with guns a blazin' in large groups, so you should time your shots carefully in order to get the maximum effect. By doing this, you're using the ammo from a gun that you don't even have, and you save precious bullets for your other guns. **—Ramzi Takla**

Capping Team-Killers

Here's one for the FPS (first-person shooter) gamers: When you're playing a "real-world" game/mod such as COUNTER-STRIKE, TACTICAL-OPS, or STRIKE FORCE and you encounter a team-killer, just say something polite and act friendly, then purchase or find a grenade and a flashbang.

Once you've got both, follow the team-killer (this is if you're on an urban map with rooms). Before he enters a room, say "wait for me to toss a flashbang in" (or something like that), then soon after you throw in the flashbang, toss the grenade right near the entrance to the room (but still inside the room).

Once the flashbang goes off, the team-killer will rush in through the room's entrance, only to find a grenade going off right at his feet! This is a crude (yet effective and quite amusing) way to get your revenge and send those evil bastards back to where they came from. **—Chris Lincoln**

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VIRTUAL S*X WITH TERA DVD	$29	[redacted]	$15

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by Thomas L. McDonald • cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

Lord British Returns...Via Korea?

ULTIMA is dead, but Richard Garriott's new plan is a killer

The E3 press conference announcing the formation of Richard Garriott's new company, Destination Games, was held several long blocks from the Los Angeles Convention Center. Summoning doughy-centered, gin-soaked journalists to this location was akin to asking them to climb the Matterhorn. Despite this and an utter lack of visible refreshments in the conference room, I left thinking that Destination was on to something.

It didn't start that way. I sat down, opened my press kit, and learned that Garriott's first new company since forming Origin—arguably one of the two or three most important PC gaming companies ever—would be bringing LINEAGE—THE BLOOD PLEDGE to America as its first act. This is akin to Michael Jordan launching a new sports league dedicated to foosball. It didn't strike me as the kind of opening salvo to make EA.com quake.

As I listened to the business plan and thought through its ramifications, however, I realized that Garriott had pulled off a quietly brilliant little coup. The growth market for online gaming is Asia. The biggest American online gaming company—Sony Online Entertainment—only recently began moving into the Asian market. Because Destination Games was formed as a unit of LINEAGE publisher NCSoft, the largest online gaming company in Asia, it begins life with a larger ready market than Sony has.

In addition, NCSoft is a public company on the Korean stock market, and quite a successful one at that. Garriott's alliance with NCSoft gives him a large stake in a successful Asian company, gives NC a foothold in the United States, and allows Garriott to move the company to the U.S. stock exchange. If he never makes a single original game, he'll make a pile of money just by moving NCSoft to the NASDAQ.

But there's more to the deal than that. Garriott has hired about 50 of the employees who were laid off when EA shut down Origin, thus gaining a wealth of hard-earned experience in rolling out massively multiplayer games. This team will aid designer Jake Song in the rollout of LINEAGE in America, which automatically makes the game more relevant. This is no longer a small game struggling in a foreign market, but a foreign game being localized by the people behind ULTIMA ONLINE. The character Lord British belongs to Garriott, so he will be brought into LINEAGE to add some brand-name appeal.

Garriott, Starr Long, and other UO vets will then move on to TABULA RASA, the working title for a whole new 3D MMRPG. Those hoping that the largely complete UO2 code might be salvaged by Destination will be disappointed, however. As Garriott told us: "We wish UO2 was available. We would buy it. But we got answers from EA ranging

Illustrations by Colin Adams

Coming to America: LINEAGE.

from 'no f***ing way' to far above market price." So Destination is left to start from scratch, and create a new game in a fantastical contemporary setting.

LINEAGE made only the most mild impression upon me, as I related in this spot several months ago. It seemed like a perfectly fine old-school 2D game with five-year-old graphics. As I have since learned, through my experience with SHATTERED GALAXY and screen shots from other Korean games, there is a distinct look to Korean games. That is, they tend to look like WARCRAFT (the first one). This means they're about five years out of date to American eyes.

After reloading LINEAGE and spending more time trudging through the world, I'm slightly more kindly disposed to its quirky mechanics, but the game is still a hard sell. Travel at night is wretched, with most characters seeing only a tiny pinprick of light in a great sea of darkness—except for the elves, who see everything as though through a bowl of lime Jell-O. It seems like DIABLO II with more people and a more vigorous economy. To about a million-odd D2 fans, that's probably be enough to recommend it regardless of the graphics. Since I find DIABLO II multiplayer about as entertaining as squeezing blackheads, it's a pass for me.

Simplistic combat and rudimentary stats and character development are the past, not the future, of online RPGs.

But LINEAGE is hardcore stuff in its native land, spawning real-life geek gangs and real-life geek-gang violence, so what do I know? In an eye-opening piece for *Time* magazine, writer Michelle Levander describes the cult-like allure of the game in Korea, and paints a pretty vivid portrait of its fans. (Check out the article at **www.time.com/time/interactive/entertainment/gangs_np.html**.) Imagine a weird mixture of John Woo movie and high-school D&D club, and you'll get the picture.

Will this translate to the United States? Will we have gangs of LINEAGE fans roaming about, busting heads in real life and entering cafes shouting "Where is the wizard? Bring me the wizard!" Sadly, no—though it's something I'd pay $10 a month to see. CGW

Picking the Scab

More on EA.com

For the past two months I've been wondering aloud about the strange phenomenon that caused all the executives at Electronic Arts to stop taking their medications and start gibbering like lunatics exposed to some Lovecraftian horror. I've been wondering because EA seems to have created a business plan based upon first investing heavily in massively multiplayer and Internet gaming, and then firing everyone who knows anything about the subject.

I was particularly struck by the fact that Westwood, which has shown an ability to make precisely one (albeit good) game over and over again for five or six years, has been tasked with creating a new online space combat game (EARTH AND BEYOND) from the ground up, without any brand-name recognition or proven skill at making online 3D games.

Why is this so striking? Because EA owned Origin and sacrificed the developer on its unholy altar, while Origin was at work on a WING COMMANDER/PRIVATEER online game. This game was under the guidance of Andy Hollis, one of the most respected names in simulation. So you have a recipe that includes a) a team with years of 3D space-combat experience, b) a company that acquired a vast store of massively multiplayer development experience the hard way, c) a producer with a shelf full of sim awards, and d) one of the three or four most lucrative game licenses in history, and you pitch it out the window in favor of a new 3D game from a company with lots of experience making tiny 2D guys walk in the wrong direction.

After all the effort it took to brainstorm this business plan, EA celebrated by sacking everyone at Kesmai and maybe killing a puppy or two. Oh, and by pissing away a hundred mil on a dopey HARRY POTTER title that will never, ever, ever earn out even if it somehow spontaneously reveals the location of the True Cross.

After reporting that story, I got word from my Deep Throat (no kidding, it was Linda Lovelace herself who tipped me off) on what happened inside What Used to be Origin. My source had this to say:

"Andy has left EA and Origin permanently. The WING COMMANDER massively multiplayer game never got off the ground. Eventually it turned into PRIVATEER ONLINE, which ultimately got canceled. Andy went on to work with EA Sports on some of their products. He started work on the HARRY POTTER game here at Origin, which never saw the light of day. Andy was and is very well thought of by EA and Origin. However, he just didn't want to leave Austin for opportunities EA had for him in other parts of the world. So he elected to move on and remain in Austin."

by Stefan "Desslock" Janicki • desslock@desslock.com

Expanding Worlds

Why are good RPG expansions so hard to find?

Intuitively, RPGs seem like ideal candidates for expansion packs. It takes an arduously long time to create RPGs because of their inherent size and complexity, so companies are reluctant to abandon an engine after releasing a single product. And RPG fans tend to be more forgiving of a dated engine than fans of other game genres. So why haven't we seen more RPG expansion packs, and why have the ones we have seen been largely disappointing? Doesn't everyone love frolicking in a new dungeon?

From a publisher's perspective, add-on packs aren't as attractive as stand-alone products because expansions naturally appeal only to a subset of the original game's purchasers. Only one traditional RPG has spawned an expansion during the past five years without selling more than a million copies worldwide and that game, ICEWIND DALE, still sold well and was a spin-off from a blockbuster RPG.

Without a proven and committed audience, expansion packs don't merit a publisher's consideration, so only the few RPGs that are big commercial successes are going to spawn expansion packs. We're destined never to see the expanded adventures of the not-so-colorful BETRAYAL IN ANTARA crew, because that title sold about 985,000 too few copies.

There are problems endemic to RPG expansion packs as well. To craft an expansion pack for a shooter, sim, or strategy game, the developers have to add a handful of new units and prepare an assortment of new levels or missions. But since most RPGs feature huge gaming worlds offering literally hundreds of hours of gameplay, it's difficult to quickly and affordably produce an expansion pack that provides comparable value. It's time consuming to craft new areas for an RPG because the developers have to stock the territory with quests, NPCs, and dialogue.

The developers of an RPG add-on are typically given only enough resources and time to produce a couple dozen additional hours of gameplay, which is usually about 10 percent of the gameplay offered by the original game. It's difficult for companies to justify creating a more substantial expansion pack because of the limited market for a supplemental product and because they can't charge as much for an add-on. If companies take the time to craft a more significant expansion, they usually opt to release the product as a full-price spin-off or sequel, like FALLOUT 2 and MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII, which they can also sell to players who missed the original product.

There are other problems with RPG expansions. Because RPGs usually wrap up their story lines, it's difficult to sensibly extend the plot for the few hours of gameplay offered by the expansion pack without diminishing the original game's conclusion. So expansion packs are usually set prior to the end of the original game, which makes them less interesting to players who have already seen the game's finale.

Instead of meaningfully improving the original game's features, add-ons also tend to just provide a collection of tediously powerful critters and cater to munchkin fans who crave unbalancing über weapons. The best RPGs offer far more than nifty items and monsters with lots of hit points, yet those are the only elements consistently earmarked for inclusion in RPG expansion packs.

There's still hope for RPG fans, since expansion pack developers seem to be learning from past mistakes. To redeem itself for releasing the disappointingly short ICEWIND DALE add-on, Interplay is releasing a free additional supplement. The DIABLO II expansion also looks well polished, and the BALDUR'S GATE II expansion pack carries on the plot of the series and should offer more hours of gameplay than most stand-alone games. The modular structure of NEVERWINTER NIGHTS should allow the planned expansions to better emulate the more satisfying, prepackaged adventures that are created for tabletop RPGs.

It's promising to see some developers on the right track to producing worthwhile RPG expansion packs. CGW

ICEWIND DALE: HEART OF WINTER features great art and music, but dozens of uninspired monsters and ridiculously overpowered weapons make the game play more like a bad DIABLO clone than like *D&D*.

The DIABLO II expansion may offer more of the same—but that's a good thing to the legions of D2 fans.

by Robert Coffey • robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

Head Games

What does your game want?

Working on last month's SIMSVILLE cover story, I noticed that there seems to be something different driving that game, something fundamentally human. Instead of forcing game behaviors through scripted events and the like, Will Wright and Maxis seem to be taking a different tack, crafting a game driven by human needs and desires.

But it's not as if Maxis was the first to consider or codify human motivation. More than 50 years ago, Abraham Maslow posited that human motivation could be described as a hierarchy of human needs, broken into two groups: deficiency needs and growth needs. According to his theory, deficiency needs must be met first, starting with the most basic and moving up the ladder as each successive need is met. Only when all the deficiency needs have been met will an individual move on to the growth needs. How does this process play out in SIMSVILLE?

Deficiency Needs

1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, and so on.

Immediately upon arriving in a new town, Sims will let you know they need food. That's one reason players generally build farms and markets almost immediately upon starting a new game.

2) Safety and security.

The first real danger Sims face is a lack of income. Early in the game, that farm/market combo will employ your first SimCitizens, but you'll have to keep creating businesses to draw and keep new residents.

3) Belongingness and love.

Just as in THE SIMS, your Sims are going to need companionship relatively early in the game. You'll be able to engineer friendships and marriages in order to meet these needs. But if you screw up, loneliness and divorce will quickly follow.

4) Esteem: to achieve and be competent, to gain approval and recognition.

If there's one need SIMSVILLE doesn't include, this is it. But you could argue that all the Sims have a strong need for recognition—the player's recognition. As in THE SIMS, they'll yell and wave their arms to get your attention if you're not meeting their needs. Fail to recognize them and your town will suffer.

THE SIMS ONLINE, however, plays to this need in a huge way, rewarding players who achieve celebrity for their Sims as well as rewarding groups of Sims that draw the most players to live in their online neighborhoods.

Growth Needs

5) Cognitive: to know, understand, and explore.

Sims will be able to attend night school and receive training in order to better their lives and employment status.

6) Aesthetic: symmetry, order, and beauty.

While THE SIMS emphasized unusual room shapes and good lighting to please Sims, SIMSVILLE residents will respond to the greater environment as well as their own homes. Parks and high-quality shopping options will result in happier towns; towns that don't meet their Sims' need for beauty and order will devolve into lawlessness.

7) Self-actualization: to find self-fulfillment and realize one's potential.

A highly trained physician trapped as a grocery store cashier is going to grow increasingly unhappy and demand a better job. Fail to satisfy her, and she'll move out of town.

8) Transcendence: to help others find self-fulfillment and realize their potential.

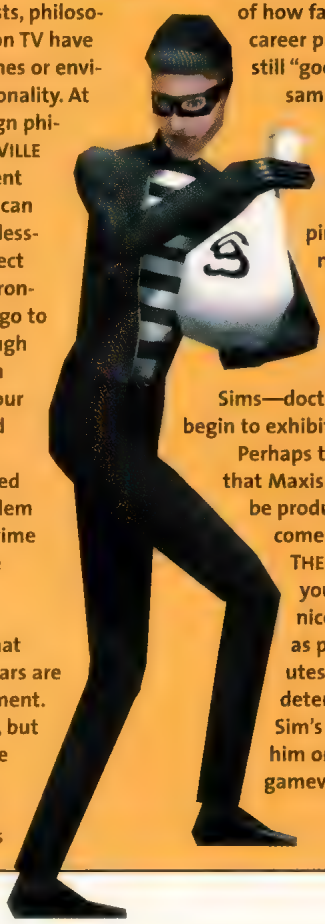
By meeting (or possibly intentionally disregarding) the previous seven needs, SIMSVILLE players themselves are the most likely to have this need fulfilled. CGW

Nature vs. Nurture

Psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, and talking heads on TV have long debated whether genes or environment determines personality. At least according to its design philosophy, you can put SIMSVILLE squarely in the environment camp. While your villages can devolve into rampant lawlessness, crime occurs as a direct result of a depressed environment. If a town begins to go to seed, if there are not enough jobs to go around, you can expect at least a few of your Sims to resort to theft and arson for fun and profit. Crime is so solidly identified as an environmental problem that, unlike in THE SIMS, crime isn't an option among the game's eight potential career paths.

And it's worth noting that even in THE SIMS, the avatars are products of their environment. Yes, crime is a career path, but look at the behavior of the Sims: Even criminals are social beings craving love and friendship. Regardless of how far down the criminal career path Sims may be, they are still "good" people, wanting the same degrees of comfort and companionship as other Sims. They are still seeking a fundamentally benevolent form of happiness. Only when their needs are not met or when they are forced to interact with Sims with whom they are intrinsically incompatible do any Sims—doctors, stuntmen, thieves—begin to exhibit truly antisocial behavior.

Perhaps the strongest evidence that Maxis considers "bad" people to be products of their environment comes in the very beginning of THE SIMS, when you create your first Sim. Good or evil, nice or mean aren't offered as possible personality attributes. Those characteristics are determined by how well your Sim's other attributes allow him or her to fit into your gameworld.



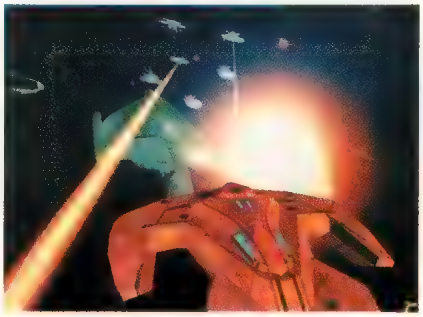
by T. Byrl Baker • tbyrlbaker@msn.com

Freebies From Outer Space

A HOMEWORLD mod and some handheld shareware for space geeks

Mod teams' greatest asset is their lack of resources. Their bad ideas tend to die from lack of attention, while the good ones get better as talented and passionate folks are drawn into the project based on their interest—not on the fact that some suit is paying them to finish it.

Mods using popular licenses like STAR WARS and STAR TREK are the ones to beware of: With those, popularity is never a sign of quality. The subject matter ends up attracting people who otherwise would know better, and the built-in audience gives shoddy products far more credit than is due. The SACRIFICE OF THE ANGELS mod for HOMEWORLD, which lets players relive the Dominion War from *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, is an exception to this rule. The team has modeled nearly all the ships from the conflict, from B'Rel Birds of Prey and Galaxy Class heavy cruisers to Diamonds, Borg Cubes, and Spheres. The ships are beautiful given the limitations of the HOMEWORLD engine, and the mod obviously was balanced by true Trekkers. The ships and a few maps are at **www.thegamingunion.co.uk/Utopia_Planetia**, which also has STAR TREK mods from other teams. CGW



Live out your own *Deep Space Nine: Dominion War* fantasies in SACRIFICE OF THE ANGELS, a user mod created for HOMEWORLD.

Pocket Rocket

Handheld gaming gems

A Compaq iPAQ 3650 landed on my doorstep a few weeks ago and has since proved that Pocket PCs are viable gaming platforms, thanks to the efforts of the freeware and shareware gaming communities. I quickly downloaded the Pocket PC version of DOOM, which looks terrific on the iPAQ's compact screen and even sounds excellent, but then stumbled across the iPAQ's Achilles' heel: It can't handle multiple button presses. Shooters aren't much fun when you can't fire on the go, so I started looking for games that took better advantage of the touch screen and ended up finding ROCKETELITE, the most enjoyable arcade action game I've played in years ($19; **www.rocketelite.com**).

The core of the game is like LUNAR LADDER: You use the thrust of your tiny ship to overcome the pull of gravity so you can make gentle landings on a planet's surface. The twist is that there are scientists and power-ups you need to pick up, and they are always trapped in very inconvenient places. It takes a lot of finesse to complete each mission, and the absolute smoothness of the game's engine means every mistake is your own fault.

Tapping or holding the stylus down next to the ship makes the craft point in that direction, and the thrusters fire with power proportional to the stylus' distance from the ship. Moving the stylus in circles around the ship makes the craft spin in circles, and it takes a few hours of practice to get the hang of things. As with most classic games, ROCKETELITE's simple premise unfolds into some complex gameplay options, especially when you try to speed through a level or get fancy and rack up points. Don't download it unless you can spare the registration fee, because designer Douglas Beck will get your money once ROCKETELITE gets its hooks into you.

All you Palm OS folks can rest easy, because the second best arcade action game I've seen in ages is but a free, tiny download away. SFCAVE lets you guide a flying ribbon through a tunnel filled with vertical barriers. If any part of the ribbon touches anything, it's game over. The best place to get it is **www.meighan.com/sfcave**, which also has a Java version you can play online (stay away from the lame 3D version).

SFCAVE is so simple you can play it using only one button. Hold it down to increase the ribbon's angle of attack and make the object climb, or release the button to let gravity take over. As in ROCKETELITE, it's the gravity that makes this game great. Since players can't change the rate of descent, they must anticipate where the ribbon will end up long before they release the button. Barriers come on fast and furious as the game progresses, and the relentless tunnel gets progressively more narrow and twisty, so that by the time I mastered the controls I was able to reach that elusive Zen state that every game since TETRIS has tried to produce.

Watching the ribbon rise and fall is simply mesmerizing, like sticking your hand out of the window of a speeding car and twisting it in the wind. Where was this when I had an Atari?

by Bruce Geryk • ceremony@net66.com

Out of Paper

Wargame rules are great bathroom reading

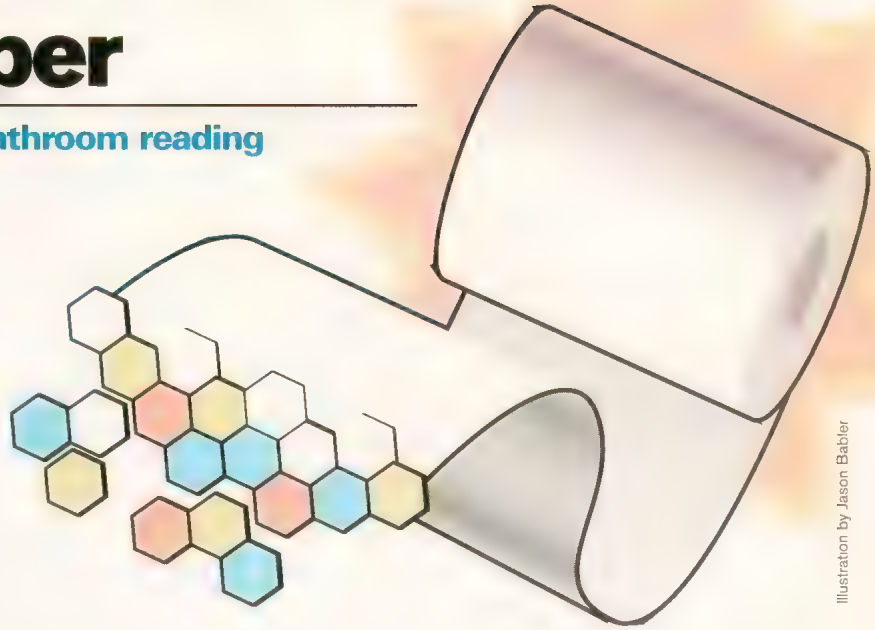


Illustration by Jason Babler

I'm officially an old fogey.

Not "old" in an objective "I survived the Paris Commune" sense, but I'm definitely getting up there. You know how I know this? Wargaming. I'm starting to go softcore.

Back in my junior high school days, I belonged to a club that played wargames by mail. There were players all over the world; I remember playing WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN with a guy in Australia. Every now and then in the club newsletter, I'd read something about how some old guy (probably over 30!) was complaining that games these days had "too many rules." It was invariably someone who had limited time to play games, and wanted more stuff with all kinds of things no real wargamer would stomach. Area movement, for example. And games you could finish in an afternoon or evening. Wusses. What kind of game would that be? Weren't games, by definition, supposed to take over your basement? And who the heck didn't have enough time to play wargames?

Computer wargames were supposed to change the genre by fitting 50 million bazillion hexes into a tiny box that sat on top of your desk (in the basement). Now designers could depict the entire Italian theater at 100 yards per hex, and all it would take was more memory or something (I recall being kind of fuzzy on that part). Anyway, I remember playing early hex-based computer wargames—was there any other kind?—like TIGERS IN THE SNOW and EASTERN FRONT, 1941, and imagining the day when I would see perfect reproductions of my favorite boardgames on the screen, with pretty little counters and mapboards. I guess I didn't have much imagination.

That day is officially here. Whether it's TalonSoft's BATTLEGROUND and CAMPAIGN series of games, John Tiller's PANZER CAMPAIGNS titles, or Norm Koger's THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR, it's now possible to play wargames in electronic form that, had they been released as boardgames, would have forced me to buy a new house. And you know what? I don't have that much time.

These days, I'm much more likely to be interested in a game that has broad scope but eschews detail in favor of a stylized system with fewer rules and an emphasis on strategy. I don't care so much anymore if the units are armored battalions with a generalized "attack factor" and no separate rules to differentiate vehicle types. I want to be challenged by strategic possibilities and deep gameplay, not by having to keep track of vehicle and weapon minutiae. In other words, I'm starting to sound exactly like those guys in my old club newsletter. I had better check—sounds like I'm over 30.

Detailed wargame manuals still make for great bathroom reading, though. Especially those with lots of rules about supply. CGW

Gamers Sound Off for More Complexity

The fact is, maybe I am out of touch. A couple of issues ago, I asked for your opinions about the direction strategic-level wargames should take. This column is going to press just as that issue hits newsstands and mailboxes, but a few early birds took the time to share their thoughts, and the sentiment seems to be to take strategic games in a more complex direction.

Greg O'Hare felt that the tactical level should be as detailed as possible, with a "complex algorithm taking into account vehicle types present, armor of individual vehicles, speed, armament, and so on, with losses [taken] accordingly."

James Eckert emailed to say that one of his ideas from a few years back was to have battles that took place in a particular hex of one of the V FOR VICTORY series games transferred to a tactical-level game like KAMPFGRUPPE. That's a lot of gaming. James made several excellent observations in his letter, including the point that the tactical level needs to be the focus of the game (as in X-COM), with the strategic layer essentially an excuse to have battles—or the tactical game needs to be very simple, because "you can't just cut out to play a whole other game very often unless it's short." He cited CONQUEST OF THE NEW WORLD as the best example of this kind of limited tactical mode. The advantage is that with a simple tactical game, the AI can be challenging. The disadvantage is that no wargamer is going to accept tanks and fighter aircraft on a five-square-wide grid.

James also made one of the most astute observations about gaming that I've heard in a while:

"Players may say that they want real combat to crop up when two units meet, but they don't. Players frequently cry out for more control and when they get it they complain about micromanagement. Years of playing games and listening to players has taught me this: People are extremely good judges of what they do like, but very poor judges of what they will like."

Finally, Don Martin wrote in to say he'd like to see a strategic/tactical game of the English Civil War. I'm with you Don, but we'll have to keep dreaming.

by Jeff Green

The Next Game Goddess

Upon getting beat by his seven-year-old, Jeff searches his soul

This month, I'm putting on the Dad cap again. If this topic bores you, then I suggest that, for the next 800 words, you picture me in just the Dad cap and a leather sock. That should liven things up a bit.

As much as I hate it when writers gush about their offspring in public, I think that in my case, I'm willing to make an exception—and you should be too. Here's why. I believe that, after extensive research and investigation, I have stumbled upon a world exclusive scoop, to be revealed for the very first time now in the pages of *Computer Gaming World* magazine. I believe that living under my roof, eating food paid for by my own barely earned money, is the Next Game Goddess: Sarah Green, seven-year-old.

Yeah, sure, I know what you're thinking. *What kind of b.s. nepotism is this? I could have been the next Game God too, if Jeff Green had fathered me!* To this I have two responses. First, don't be so sure that I didn't. I used to be quite the ladies man. Chances are that quite a number of you are carrying that inimitable Green seed. Second, I am a professional game journalist. I don't make claims about "Game Gods" lightly. I have proof.

Submitted for your approval now is Exhibit A: a letter, written to me by my daughter a few weeks ago. I will print it in its entirety:

Dear daddy,

I love you so much that it spills off the world!! Do you love me that much daddy? Can we play EQ, and level up Nimbar?

Love, Sarah.

While pausing for a moment to admire the naïve poetic brilliance of that opening line, I direct your attention to that crucial final sentence, "Can we play EQ and level up Nimbar?" Note, first, that not only does my seven-year-old want to play EVERQUEST (a startlingly sophisticated step up from the standard "kiddie software" favored by most children her age), but she actually refers to the game by the nickname that only savvy, in-the-know players use. Her perfect usage of the term "level up" is also impressive, as is her implied realization that that is, in fact, all that EVERQUEST is about.

Finally, and most importantly, there is the letter's savvy psychological trickery. Note what she really wants here, and how cleverly she manipulates my emotions beforehand to try to get it. Although I don't remotely question the genuineness of my daughter's affection for me, I think we can all see what the real point of this letter is—she just wants to play the damn game. This strategy—buttering up a loved one with compliments before asking if you can play a game—is one that takes many poor gamers years to figure out and perfect. I usually resort to whining and lying, myself. But for Sarah to psychologically blackmail me at age seven? This is sheer genius.

***

Okay, so maybe I'm getting a bit hysterical here. But really, can you blame me? Developing right before my eyes, in my own house, is a real-live gamer. My DNA did that. I know that when I last wrote about Sarah in these pages, I expressed concern about this. I wondered if perhaps I had inadvertently created a monster, and would regret exposing her to the joys of computer gaming—now that I was having so much trouble getting her to stop for such things as sleep, food, and school.

A legitimate concern, to be sure, and one that I continue to work on. But now, frankly, I have much bigger worries. Now, I'm just concerned that the kid is getting too good, too fast. This is the real downside of my kid's nascent gaming skills. She's not afraid of me anymore. In our favorite boardgame, *Mancala* (an African game similar to backgammon), she completely owns me now. She's taking me on and she's kicking my ass—and I wish I could say I was letting her do it on purpose.

All parents go through this. At first you cheat all the time, to ensure that the kid wins and you don't have a bloodcurdling tantrum on your hands (this is how we used to have to play QUAKE at *CGW* with former hardware editor Dave Salvator). Later, as kids get a bit older, you start winning a little, to teach them the fundamentals of sportsmanship. "You can't win every time," you say. "Remember, it's just about having a good time."

> **"I can't run a national gaming magazine if I'm constantly getting beat by a bratty little first-grader."**

Yeah, right. Sure. That's a lot easier to say when you're the one winning. Now that I'm getting my head handed to me by a seven-year-old, I'm finding this whole "be a good sport" twaddle a little harder to swallow.

It's not funny. Seriously. I need to win. I can't run a national gaming magazine if I'm constantly getting beat by a bratty little first-grader. So this is why, starting now, at my house, all game playing has been permanently banned for those under age 35. For the first time ever, I finally agree with all those jerks out there: Computer games are evil. I have a budding game goddess under my roof—and before she gets any better and humiliates me any further, I'm putting a stop to it right now. CGW

What Jeff doesn't realize is that Sarah had been letting him win at Mancala for the past five years. Call him a crybaby at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

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